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# Patristic Precedent and Vernacular Innovation: the Practice and Theory of Anglo-Saxon Translation

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Andrew Timothy Eichel entitled "Patristic Precedent and Vernacular Innovation: the Practice and Theory of Anglo-Saxon Translation." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Roy M. Liuzza, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Laura L. Howes, Allen R. Dunn, Thomas E. Burman

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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**Patristic Precedent and Vernacular Innovation:  
the Practice and Theory of Anglo-Saxon  
Translation**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Andrew Timothy Eichel  
December 2016

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## Acknowledgements

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## **Abstract**

My dissertation investigates Anglo-Saxon translation and interpretation during the reign of King Alfred of Wessex in the ninth century, and the Benedictine Reform of the tenth and eleventh centuries. These two periods represent a time of renaissance in Anglo-Saxon England, when circumstance and ambition allowed for a number of impressive reformation enterprises, including increased dedication to education of both clerical orders and the laity, which therefore augmented the output of writing motivated by scholarly curiosity, ecclesiastical inquiry, and political strategizing. At these formative stages, translation emerged as perhaps the most critical task for the vernacular writers. The Latinate prestige culture that was most often being translated was entrenched in a tradition of spiritual and philosophical austerity so early translators risked more than just their reputations by using the vernacular and thereby announcing its fitness as a vehicle of abstract and spiritual truths. Unfortunately, research into the history of English translation and its contributions to the Western interpretive tradition is still underdeveloped. The Anglo-Saxon period has either been ignored completely or dismissed as derivative, and these assumptions have misrepresented the achievements of Old English translators and restrained essential inquiry. My dissertation expands knowledge of English's progress by investigating the relationship between the translation and interpretation strategies of the Church patriarchs and the methodologies of Anglo-Saxon writers. This project demonstrates that along with copying the practices and theories of Doctors of the Church like Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory, Anglo-Saxon translators deviated from the parameters set by tradition and turned acts of translation into instances of vernacular variation and innovation. By investigating the intellectual roots and contexts for some of these sites of early translation, I advance a more exact understanding of how and why Anglo-Saxon writers used particular strategies in their encounters with Latin discourse and how these strategies fit into the wider arena of translation and interpretation.

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## Introduction

My dissertation offers a reassessment of Old English translation by synthesizing the theoretical and practical habits of three of the period's most prolific translators to reveal the interpretive role of vernacular innovations alongside patristic doctrines. The rendering enterprises of Alfred, Æthelwold, and Ælfric – and many other Anglo-Saxon writers in early medieval England – are responsible for translating into the vernacular great portions of the patristic legacy and Christian scripture. While critics have attended to many aspects of these translators and their efforts, especially in the past decade or so, the historical record is far from complete and interpretations have had to be revised in the face of new discoveries. There has been an increase in research by medieval specialists into translation but few scholars embrace both conceptual and applied methodologies, choosing rather to focus on one or the other to the detriment of both. The resulting account of Anglo-Saxon translation is often fragmented and discordant, both for medieval specialists interested in pursuing translation as a research topic and for translation scholars trying to establish a history of Western translation.

My project is thus aimed at bridging a divide between specialists in Anglo-Saxon or medieval literature and translation historians and theorists. Both groups have a vested interest in early English translation but there is too little collaboration. Old English specialists often study translation without recourse to

insights made available by translation studies; one result is that translation scholars do not have adequate information about how Old English translators fit into the history of Western translation, so they either make sweeping generalizations or marginalize Anglo-Saxon writers. Without an influx of dialogue and debate with outside researchers, there is the real risk that medievalists and translation specialists will continue to pursue isolated topics, thereby stifling potential areas of research. By overlooking Old English practice and theory, translation scholars can only create a patchwork history that is incomplete, for example, without more research into topics such as *sermo humilis* and *lectio divina*. This is a circular system, unfortunately, but my goal in the following chapters is, above all, to provide an example of how this cycle can be broken by providing detailed analyses of Old English translators that integrate the philological and new historical methodologies of medieval studies with the comparative and theoretical lenses of translation studies. This is a very wide net to cast but by providing comparative analyses of Old English translations with Latin sources and framing textual strategies with patristic, Anglo-Saxon, and contemporary theoretical statements, I intend in the following chapters to show that Alfred, Æthelwold, and Ælfric were informed by Jerome and Augustine but their practice and theory complicate the convention of medieval translation as word-for-word or sense-for-sense. I strongly believe that a single-author or single-text study would be unable to illustrate either the range of innovative translation techniques available to Old

English writers or the conceptual impacts and implications of those methodologies.

My project begins in Chapter 1 with an investigation of two of King Alfred's least researched translations – Augustine of Hippo's *Soliloquia* and the first fifty *Psalms*. I have selected these neglected texts precisely because they reveal a surprisingly inventive and diverse range of rendering strategies that align with Alfred's goals of didactic guidance and cultural improvement. The king of Wessex may lack the formal training and finesse of Æthelwold and Ælfric, but he aggressively uses the medium of translation as a mode of exegetical amplification. Generally accepted as his last translations, the *Soliloquies* and *Psalms* also highlight the king's interweaving of patristic authority and personal ingenuity. Although he is aware of orthodox concerns about translating holy writ, for example, the king still employs techniques that modify the aesthetic, denotative, and connotative aspects of his sources.

In Chapter 2, I treat one of the most marginalized translators in Anglo-Saxon England, Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester. As a leading figure of the Benedictine Reform, Æthelwold was entrusted with translating the *Rule of St. Benedict*, the religious order's sacrosanct collection of doctrines and instructions. This chapter demonstrates that the monastic practice of *lectio divina* and training in Latin and Old English rhetoric and grammar help the bishop to create arguably the most fluent and idiomatic translation of Latin prose in the Anglo-Saxon period. Æthelwold integrates the Anglo-Latin style of hermeneutic writing with

Anglo-Saxon techniques like alliteration, doublets, and exegetical insertions. For all his expertise, however, the bishop, like Alfred, deliberately alters the words of Benedict in order to forward his own political and theological agendas.

Ælfric's translations of Genesis and Esther are the topic of Chapter 3. More than any other known Old English translator, Ælfric grapples with rendering scripture in the vernacular, and all of his translation theories and practices revolve around these experiences. Many of his prefaces contain pronouncements of his intense anxieties about handling the Bible, yet Ælfric still produced skillful translations. To highlight his subtle blending of fidelity and stylistic originality, I compare passages of Ælfric's prose Genesis with the Old English verse rendering of *Genesis A*. Later in his life the abbot developed a different, more liberal translation methodology that seems to clash with his earlier pronouncements. Esther serves as the example of this strategy and serves as evidence of Ælfric's evolution from the anxious renderer of Genesis to the confident hermeneut of Esther.

I am not alone in seeing a need for change in how scholars handle Anglo-Saxon translation. One of the most recent book-length explorations of the subject is *Reversing Babel: Translation among the English during an Age of Conquest, c. 800 to c. 1200* (2012) by Bruce O'Brien. O'Brien is an historian and the impetuses he reveals for his interest in the traditionally "literary" topic of translation mirror my own:

It was a language issue — most suitably dealt with by the linguists and literature specialists. Yet the work of linguists and literature

specialists in Old English, Anglo-French, or Latin was spread far and wide in scholarly journals and monodisciplinary books, and, as is the predilection in those disciplines, they dealt often with single points of translation: a text, a manuscript, an encounter. For the literary schools, this made sense, as it was the texts that were important.... The common focus on individual texts, authors, or copies has remained even as the analyses of scholars of literature have expanded to cover in increasingly rich detail and insight the social and historical context of their sources. For this reason I think they were not inclined to produce syntheses of work..., nor portraits of translation that included all aspects of it.<sup>1</sup>

O'Brien criticizes literary treatment of medieval vernacular translation on two grounds: first, he argues that the scholarship is too fractured and scattered; second, he claims that specialists too often focus on minutiae. As a result of these disciplinary tendencies, it is impossible for even specialists to attain a holistic understanding of translation in the period, let alone non-specialists. Like O'Brien, I initiated my project in part because I saw a need for research that considered more than *either* the philological *or* the theoretical – *both* are needed to correctly interpret the significance of Anglo-Saxon contributions to the history of Western translation. There has been an increase in research by medieval specialists into

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce R. O'Brien, *Reversing Babel: Translation Among the English during an Age of Conquest, c. 800 to c. 1200* (Newark: Delaware UP, 2012), 5-6.

translation but few scholars embrace both conceptual and applied methodologies. O'Brien identifies as particularly praiseworthy Robert Stanton's *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* when he observes "There is only one study of translation to which a historian of Anglo-Saxon England could turn to see some of the issues discussed within a longer view of the phenomenon."<sup>2</sup> The scope and detail of Stanton's investigation is without precedent and remains to this day the singlemost important work on old English translation. My own project owes much to Stanton's research and was begun not because I think Stanton is wrong but because he, like all scholars, was limited by the scope of his undertaking. Inevitably, something is left out and my dissertation is an attempt to fill in some of the gaps left by Stanton's own recuperative efforts.

In fact, Stanton lays out the limits of his study in his introduction. After declaring translation is "an overarching idea to explain Anglo-Saxon literary culture," he acknowledges that

At least two other books have put forward similar unifying concepts: Seth Lerer has advanced the literate mentality [in *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature*], Martin Irvine the master discourse of *grammatica* as ways of gathering together and interpreting intellectual activity in the period [in *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory, 300-1100*]. Another book with yet another cultural model may seem to be unhelpfully fragmenting the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 6.

study of the period, but in fact no single paradigm can every fully characterize something as dynamic and protean as Anglo-Saxon culture.... The idea of a culture of translation is not intended to replace but to supplement the models of Lerer and Irvine.<sup>3</sup>

Stanton admirably produces a sophisticated assessment of Anglo-Saxon literary culture that, in my opinion, surpasses Lerer's and matches Irvine's in terms of scope and complexity. Irvine's claims and findings are liberally supported by detailed textual analysis of Anglo-Saxon source texts, but Stanton's arguments do not rely on comparative analysis of Latin exemplars with Old English translations. Instead, his discussion is more concerned, for example, with how monastic learning centers and their exegetical habits inform Anglo-Saxon translators. Stanton's contribution to these topics has greatly enriched our understanding of translation habits, but much of his evidence and discussion hovers at the historical and theoretical level so readers lose sight vernacular translators actually grappling with Latin source texts. I have reversed Stanton's hierarchy by shifting my focus to source and target text comparisons and using theoretical considerations as secondary support.

If Stanton's *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* is the most important book on Old English translation, then Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

*Texts* (1991) is the most important book on late medieval translation.<sup>4</sup> Copeland asserts that her research “seeks to show how translation is inscribed within a large disciplinary nexus, a historical intersection of hermeneutic practice and rhetorical theory.”<sup>5</sup> Copeland’s achievement was to provide evidence that translation in the Middle Ages was a tool of ideological appropriation that eventually empowered vernacular languages to achieve levels of hitherto unexpected intellectual authority and refinement. In other words, “In reproducing the strategies of exegesis, the vernacular also reproduces the very system of exegesis.... This is the most profound effect of translation as displacement: the transference of intellectual methodology from Latin to vernacular” (223). Copeland’s fluency in the multi-disciplinary components of classical and medieval exegetical and literary theory is impressive, as is her awareness of contemporary developments in fields that share affinities with her medieval topics, leading her to quote a variety of translation and hermeneutic scholars, including Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. Unfortunately, Copeland starts her study with the theories of the Roman writers Cicero and Horace but her journey to the Boethian translations of late fifteenth-century Middle Scots poet Robert Henryson includes very few stopovers in Anglo-Saxon England: Alfred is noted only once and Bede three times.<sup>6</sup> Copeland’s decision to

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<sup>4</sup> *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*, Paperback Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred appears on page 140, Bede on pages 58, 60, and 225.



eschew Old English does not mean that her research is inapplicable to the vernacular; rather, she has created a framework for medieval interpretation and translation and it is a task for future scholars to use that framework as a guide of understanding Anglo-Saxon habits. While that research is beyond the scope of my current project, in the chapters ahead I try to highlight conjunctions and competitions between translation practice and hermeneutic theory.

There is recent research that has adopted more text-based approaches while using Stanton's and Copeland's findings as their foundation. The best such example is Nicole Guenther Discenza's *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (2005).<sup>7</sup> Discenza's project is a laudable example of philological work married with translation theory, specifically an evaluation of Alfred's translation of Boethius's *Consolation* through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's socio-political translation theory. Discenza's findings prove that exchanges between medieval and translation studies can bear fruit in both fields. Though inspired by Discenza, I have widened the scope of my inquiry to give specialist and non-specialist readers a broader view of interactions between the theories and practices of translation in early England.

Another way I have tried to move beyond typical portrayals of Anglo-Saxon translation is by including Bishop Æthelwold. Alfred and Ælfric dominate discussions of translation in the period mostly because of sheer volume: they are among the most prolific of Anglo-Saxon writers and a substantial portion of the

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<sup>7</sup> *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005).

surviving corpus stems from these two men. Æthelwold has left behind only his translation of the *Rule*, and a lack of other sources has relegated him to the margins even in medieval studies. Even more disconcerting, translation historians ignore the bishop, perhaps taking their cue from the dearth of specialist books on the figure.<sup>8</sup> Again, Stanton is the best critical barometer and his portrait of Anglo-Saxon England's "culture of translation" exemplifies Alfred and Ælfric as representing, respectively, "the tensions inherent in translation generally, and in its specific manifestation in Anglo-Saxon context" and "the problems and potentials of English translation in the period."<sup>9</sup> Stanton only refers to Æthelwold in his role as Ælfric's teacher, never as a translator, but he is not alone in his critical distance from the bishop. There is little recent research into any aspect of Æthelwold's career, and the only scholar to embark on an extended investigation of his translation of the *Rule* is Mechthild Gretsch. In Chapter 2, I provide evidence of the value of the Benedictine bishop's translation tactics, which form an essential link between Alfred's and Ælfric's practices and showcase the vernacular's linguistic and intellectual dexterity.

Æthelwold's absence from translation history is relatively inconspicuous, however, because the entire Anglo-Saxon period has yet to attract proper attention among translation specialists. Histories, anthologies, and theoretical overviews of

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<sup>8</sup> I found one reference to Æthelwold in a translation history reader. French scholar Michel Ballard writes, "La première retombée de la renaissance Benedictine fut la traduction de la *Regle de saint Benoît* en langue vulgaire, réalisée vers 960 par l'évêque Athelwold" in *De Ciceron à Benjamin: Traducteurs, Traductions, Reflexions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Les Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2007), 62.

<sup>9</sup> Stanton (2002), 6 and 8.

Western translation sometimes begin as far back as with Plato's comments on language and writing in *Phaedrus*, although Roman orators and patristic fathers are also common starting points. In examining dozens of such books, I was struck by a common pattern that emerged: after Jerome and Augustine are discussed and dissected, the vast majority of scholars skips the medieval period completely and picks up the story of translation with Martin Luther (1483-1546) or John Dryden (1631-1700). There are a few translation scholars who include the work of Wycliffite translators in the fourteenth century. On the rare occasion when Old English is addressed, its contributions are summarized in a few sentences or relegated to a footnote in the annals of Western translation. I have found only two collections that include Old English translation in a substantial, meaningful way. *Translation – Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader* (2006), edited by Daniel Weissborth and Astradur Eysteinnsson, begins with Cicero, ends with Seamus Heaney, and includes a 12-page section on Alfred and Ælfric written by Jonathan Wilcox. The second volume is *Western Translation Theory: from Herodotus to Nietzsche* (2002), by Douglas Robinson, who gives Old English translation – again limited to Alfred and Ælfric – a 2-page summary. Neither of these readers moves beyond close-reading the theoretical, prefatory remarks of these writers, but even this allowance marks a distinct departure from other histories of translation, and I hope that more readers will be exposed to lesser-known figures through these efforts.

Unfortunately, Weissborth and Eysteinsson and Robinson are anomalies and not demonstrative of how the majority of translation specialists handle the Anglo-Saxon period. One of the most commonly cited anthologies of canonical statements in translation studies is *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti and published by Routledge. Venuti is foremost among translation scholars and Routledge is the foremost publisher of translation studies titles. This reader is in its third edition since its initial release in 2000, and it is required for many students of translation, linguistics, and literary theory: it was the first reader I was introduced to and it is used as a textbook in many prestigious translation and interpretation programs, including, but not limited to, those at University of Illinois, UC-Berkeley, University of Chicago, Kent State University, Monterey Institute, Boston University, Binghamton University, University of Warwick, and Imperial College London. While the reader's focus is self admittedly on statements from the twentieth and twenty-first century, its first unit of essays – which was not part of the original version and got added for the second edition – is devoted to pre-1900 authors, specifically Jerome, Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt, John Dryden, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The twelve hundred years separating the patristic father and the French scholar are not bereft of important figures or developments but not a single medieval English translator is included. Venuti hints at his reasoning in his introduction: "With few exceptions, commentators followed Jerome's validation of sense-for-sense translation through the Middle

Ages and into the Renaissance, so that when the translating language was no longer classical but vernacular, his precepts were still echoed.”<sup>10</sup> It is ironic that Venuti made a critical splash with *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995), a history that highlights marginalized or suppressed translation strategies, yet he has continued the marginalization and suppression of Old English translation (not to mention Middle English) by omission. Again, I realize that his reader is controlled by a myriad of publishing and editing concerns, and I am by no means blaming him for single-handedly keeping Anglo-Saxon translation from being a more mainstream interest. Rather, like Stanton in medieval studies, Venuti’s proclivities reflect those of the majority of translation specialists, though the causes and effects stretch beyond Venuti himself.

The extent and pervasiveness of this disciplinary omission can be traced in established research and more recent work. L. G. Kelly’s influential book *The True Interpreter* (1979) is one of the first studies claiming, in its subtitle, to be a “History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West.”<sup>11</sup> It has been essential for scholars in literature, linguistics, history, and translation since its publication and has not yet been matched or exceeded by any other single volume. So impressive and well-known is Kelly’s work that even the Anglo-Saxonists Stanton, Larry Swain, and Robert Bjork praise it.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of this support, Kelly overlooks the Anglo-

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<sup>10</sup> *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> *The True Interpreter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Stanton, “The (M)other Tongue: Translation Theory and Old English,” in *Translation Theory and Practice in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeanette M. A. Beer (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan UP, 1997), uses Kelly’s tripartite breakdown of translation theory into “specification of function and goal;

Saxon era, leaping in his chronicle from Augustine and Boethius to Gregory the Great and then Thomas Aquinas.<sup>13</sup> The overall erudition of Kelly's study is monumental, and the fact that he covers many figures that are arguably less influential on the course of Western translation than Old English writers makes the exclusion all the more surprising. Frederick Renner is another canonical translation scholar – still cited in contemporary research, although not as often as Kelly – who disregards the Anglo-Saxon period. In *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (1989), Renner writes that “the many centuries between classical antiquity and the eighteenth century should be regarded as a unit which is cemented by a strong tradition” (4), thus simultaneously generalizing and dismissing the Anglo-Saxon and Middle English periods. The intellectual channels that funneled classical and patristic notions to the literary and theological giants of early England are clearly outlined by both Kelly and Renner but neither deems the eight centuries or so in between to be worthy of coverage and the recent translation scholarship has kept to their pattern of marginalization. A popular introduction, *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*, edited by Jeremy Munday and revised in 2009, quotes Renner from above verbatim and does not engage with early English vernacular. Another book by Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, revised in 2012,

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description and analysis of operations; and critical comment on relationships between goal and operations” (35); Larry Swain, “Towards an Anglo-Saxon Theory of Translation,” *Mediaevalia* 26.2 (2005), 265; Bjork, in his “Review of *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*,” *JEGP* 96.1 (1997), criticizes the too-narrow subjectivity of Venuti's book and states, “one must supplement it with a book such as Kelly's *True Interpreter*” (73).

<sup>13</sup> Kelly, 71.

even skips Augustine and glosses over the word-for-word and sense-for sense debates initiated by Cicero and Jerome. Old English seems not to exist. Munday is a prolific writer and he has partnered with Routledge on more than half a dozen translation studies books, all of which are popular in classrooms but none of which do justice to the translators in medieval England. Another central handbook for translation studies that presents an incomplete view of English translation by neglecting the Anglo-Saxon period is Mona Baker's *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. Baker's 700-page catalogue of information is a required tool for scholars working in or alongside translation, yet Old English developments are summarized in a single paragraph, with Alfred and Ælfric once again being offered up as the only worthy examples. Unless a critical intervention is made to assert its integral importance, I fear Old English will become even more a specialist topic than it already is.

Another sign of the need for more nuanced defenses of Old English translation is the consistent marginalization of Anglo-Saxon contributions by biblical scholars. The history of Bible translation has been offered as a touchstone for histories of linguistic and hermeneutic developments as well, since many scriptural translators have proved pivotal in periods of cultural shift, from Jerome to Alfred to Luther. Several canonical studies of biblical translation discount Old English translations completely. This is the case, for example, in Bruce Metzger's *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*, where the only pre-Wycliffite translations that rate any coverage are the interlinear glosses of the Lindisfarne

Gospels and “a copy of the four Gospels in West Saxon orthography.”<sup>14</sup> I am baffled by the lacunae in Metzger’s timeline, which omits Alfred’s *Psalms*, all of Ælfric’s translations, and the anonymous Old English Hexateuch, among other vernacular translations of scripture. I also question his use of the phrase “West Saxon orthography,” a distinction he does not make with any other bible translation. Beryl Smalley betrays a similarly dismissive attitude toward Old English offerings to biblical translation when she labels the entire period “a dramatic pause.”<sup>15</sup> How can these works, and the many others that cite them, so casually pass over formative centuries of language development? I do not deny a “strong tradition” exists but I disagree with the implication that nothing of note occurred to challenge or complicate convention for a millennium. I am supported by *The Cambridge History of the Bible: Volume 2, the West from the Fathers to the Reformation* (2004), which has a detailed section titled “English Version of the Scriptures before Wyclif” that was written by a medievalist, not a biblical scholar. It is one of the few histories that acknowledge the role Old English translation had in inspiring later vernacular projects and elevating the philosophical and spiritual word-hoard. Outside this and a few other volumes, the overwhelming assumption seems to be that the Bible was not properly translated into English until the time of Wycliffe: Old English writers paraphrased bits and pieces of scripture, sure, but they never produced any translations to rival the learnedness or accuracy of the

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford UP, 1952; reprinted 1983), 44.



Wycliffite Bible. This dangerously inadequate narrative threatens to erase the centuries of linguistic and ecclesiastic development that were Anglo-Saxon England.

Just as translation was a constant in the initial struggle for English to increase its status so the field of Old English studies is in an ongoing struggle to assert its own relevancy and importance. The Latinate prestige culture that was most often being translated was entrenched in a tradition of spiritual and philosophical austerity, so early translators, especially of holy scripture, risked more than just their reputations by using the vernacular and thereby announcing its fitness as a vehicle of abstract ideas and even spiritual truths. Classical and patristic writers, who were the authority for nearly every intellectual undertaking, left behind a great deal of advice and dictates that were transmitted to Britain along with the legacy of Christian thought instilled in the islands shortly after the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury in the sixth century. However, along with copying the practices and theories of venerable predecessors, Anglo-Saxon translators diverged from traditional parameters and used translation for vernacular variation and innovation. The chapters that follow advance a more exact understanding of how and why three Anglo-Saxon writers used particular strategies in their encounters with Latin discourse and how these choices fit into the wider discourses of translation and interpretation.

## Chapter 1: Innovation and Tradition in Alfred's Prose Psalms

### A. Introduction

The manuscript known as the Paris Psalter, MS. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 8824, houses Old English translations of the 150 psalms, 1-50 in prose, and 51-150 in verse. Two different translators undertook these projects at two different times, but the general organization of the different versions is similar, and both sections are the work of a single scribe. The page is divided into two columns, with the Latin text of the psalm from the *Psalterium Romanum* on the left, and Old English translation facing it on the right—neither the prose nor the verse translations are based on the provided Latin. Despite the shared space, the verse translations are sometimes regarded as an afterthought: one critic suggests that they “seem to have been added to the prose translation to fill out the collection,” giving the first fifty psalms more prominence, perhaps because of Alfred's authorship.<sup>16</sup> The existence of the combined translations, as well as their lavish accompaniment in the form of 12 exquisite, full-page illustrations bedecked with precious metal foil, attests to the devotion of the ecclesiastical and lay audiences in the early Middle Ages in general, and the Anglo-Saxon period specifically.

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<sup>16</sup> Robert D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 61.

Of all King Alfred's commonly attributed translations, the *Prose Psalms* have the honor of being the most woefully under-represented in contemporary scholarship. Several factors explain this continued marginalization, as Patrick O'Neill summarizes what makes the text particularly difficult for scholars: "its use of the vernacular to translate a highly influential book of the Old Testament; its strategy of translation, which combines a paraphrase with an elaborate set of interpretative guidelines; and its attempt to convey the poetic qualities of the Psalms with appropriate stylistic expression."<sup>17</sup> The Psalms are difficult for other reasons, including the lack of a preface, which would put it on more equal critical footing with the other Alfredian texts like *Cura Pastoralis*, the *Consolatio*, and the *Soliloquia*. Also, in terms of structural inconsistencies, Alfred's prose translation only accounts for the first fifty psalms, leaving out the other one hundred for some reason.

A final obstacle to more research into the *Prose Psalms* is the debate over its authorship. Medieval historian William of Malmesbury, in the twelfth century, is the first person to attribute the psalm translations to King Alfred: "Psalterium transferre aggressus, vix prima parte explicata vivendi finem fecit."<sup>18</sup> If the chronicler is to be believed, Alfred embarked on his translation but was cut off by death, which would also explain why he only translated the

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<sup>17</sup> Patrick P. O'Neill, "The Prose Translation of Psalms 1-50," *Companion to Alfred the Great*, eds. Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 256.

<sup>18</sup> Roger A. B. Mynors, Rodney M. Thomson, and Michael Winterbottom, eds., *William of Malmesbury*, Vol 1, Book 2, cap. 123.2.

first third of the text. The usual doubts about William's veracity have kept scholars from using his statement as one of concrete proof, however.<sup>19</sup> Janet Bately's groundbreaking study, "Lexical Evidence for the Authorship of the *Prose Psalms* in the Paris Psalter," is often credited with inaugurating a more fervid dialogue in this area.<sup>20</sup> Bately's verdict, with which I concur, is that although the lexical decisions of the psalm translator deviate from the norms associated with various groups of Old English writing, particularly Mercian dialects in the ninth-century and the "Winchester Group" associated with Aethelwold in the late tenth-century, those linguistic and interpretive choices align with choices made in works from Alfred's oeuvre. Thus, according to Bately, the *Prose Psalms* were translated by whoever translated *Cura Pastoralis*, the *Consolatio*, and the *Soliloquia*. This finding received its greatest challenge in the form of two papers co-authored by Paramjit S. Gill, Tim B. Swartz, and Michael Treschow. These three authors relied heavily on statistical methodologies for isolating word- and phrase-choices in the psalm translations. Ultimately, they concluded that "the clustering algorithm separates the disputed text *The First Fifty Psalms* from the Alfredian texts {1, 2, 3} 99% of the

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<sup>19</sup> See *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, ed. George Philip Krapp, ASPR V (New York: Columbia UP, 1932), xix: "If [William's] statement bears any relation to any part of the texts contained in the Paris Psalter, the words *prima parte* might most reasonably be taken as referring to the Anglo-Saxon prose translation of the first fifty psalms. But the evidence is not sufficient to justify any positive assertion."

<sup>20</sup> Janet Bately, "Lexical Evidence for the Authorship of the *Prose Psalms* in the Paris Psalter," *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982), 69-95.

time” and, thus, that it could not be the work of Alfred.<sup>21</sup> An even more extreme refutation of Bately’s calculations is found in Malcolm Godden’s declaration that “Alfred did not ‘write’ anything,” although Godden does not include the *Prose Psalms* in his discussion.<sup>22</sup> Bately, and others, have since responded to these divergent viewpoints: Bately disputes the stylometric findings by pointing out faults in the assumption of Gill, Swartz, and Treschow that “authors/translators use high-frequency words unreflectively in the writings,” since within the *Prose Psalms* it is obvious that the translator made deliberate word-choices based on his Latin original.<sup>23</sup> And in response to lexical differences within the traditional Alfredian canon, Bately argues that “looked at in context, both Latin and English,” they are “neither ‘remarkable’ nor ‘startling’.”<sup>24</sup> The key phrase for me in this quote is “in context,” for although Bately does not go into great detail to examine these multiple contexts, that issues surrounding the creation of the *Prose Psalms* do distance it from the king’s other translations, whose own contexts are similarly complex and unique.

Many factors affected Alfred’s translation choices, including sources, target audience, utility, and the sacred nature of the source text itself. However, the most vital feature of the king’s strategy is his own prerogative to make

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<sup>21</sup> “A Stylometric Analysis of King Alfred’s Literary Works,” *Journal of Applied Statistics* 34 (2007), 1251-58; and “King Alfred’s Scholarly Writings and the Authorship of the First Fifty *Prose Psalms*,” *Heroic Age* 12 (2009), <http://www.heroicage.org/issues/12/treschowgillswartz.php>.

<sup>22</sup> Malcolm Godden, “Did King Alfred Write Anything?,” *Medium Aevum* 76.1 (2007), 1-23.

<sup>23</sup> Janet Bately, “Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?,” *Medium Aevum* 78.2 (2009), 192-96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-204.

interpretive choices that have grammatical, structural, and material effects on his target translation. These considerations differ somewhat from the details that informed his translations of, for example, the *Consolation* and the *Soliloquies*, so it stands to reason that the monarch's translation and interpretation methodologies for the *Prose Psalms* are different as well. Nonetheless, the similarities between these texts are undeniable: in places where Alfred's translation of the psalms is far from slavish, bordering on "free" translation or even adaptation, his choices are usually made to clarify or underscore. This habit is similar to the king's treatment of the difficult philosophical texts he included in his cultural program because he has in mind the same audience, mainly composed of non-literate lay readers.

## **B. Importance of Psalms and Psalters**

As opposed to the *Soliloquies*, however, there is little question as to why King Alfred and his circle chose to include the psalms in their educational reformation enterprise: the psalms are among the most used of any biblical text in the Middle Ages. M. J. Toswell lists some of the reasons for their popularity in her rigorous study, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*.<sup>25</sup>

[Psalms] served many functions in Anglo-Saxon England,  
functions which were common to Christendom: central text of the  
daily Offices, part of every liturgical service of the church, and

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<sup>25</sup> M. J. Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, Medieval Church Studies 10 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2014), 3.

probably also the first text used by oblates – thereby serving the dual purpose of introducing the oblates both to the central text of the daily Offices and to Latin, the language of their spiritual life. Moreover, the psalms were sung, not just read, forming the backbone of the music of the early church.... Finally, the psalms were part of the process of penance and part of the developing tradition of private prayer and devotion. In short, the psalms were an irreplaceable part of the very fabric of Christian devotion.

From monks and nuns to nobles to townsfolk, the psalms were at the center of all spiritual thought and practice. The Vespasian Psalter contains a preface that lays out the importance of the psalms from an eighth-century perspective:

Psalmi omnimodam institutionem spitalis disciplinae habent. Ibi multiplex prophetia. Tam de xpo quam de ecclesia. Quam de praedicatoribus. Quam de martyribus: Ibi mala declinanda et quae bona sunt sectanda docetur. Ibi consolation in tribulationibus ac persecutionibus affatim digesta continetur. Ibi ad adorandum atq: laudandum dm hortamur. Ibi quae sit vera beatitudo quod philosophi nescierunt docetur Ibi meditatio legis di toto studio praecipitur. Ibi misericordia bonitasque di commendatur. Ibi iusta omnia iudiciae ius conprobantur. Ibi ut patientia in tribulationibus habeatur monetur in mandando: Ibi iustitia et rectum iudicium valde laudatur. Ibi ne potentes timeantur hortatur. Ibi initium

sapientiae timor di. Ibi confession et paenitentia peccatorum et  
remissio insinuatur. Ibi etiam zelare iusti in peccatores  
prohibentur: Ibi alleluia docetur. Ubiqumq: apud nos dicitur.  
Laudate dnm in ebreo habet. Alleluia. et ibi in alleluia  
consummatur psalterium.<sup>26</sup>

The passage emphasizes the way the psalms gather together everything that is important about Christian thought and practice: they are repositories for Old Testament historical figures and events as well as prophecies and eschatological prefigurations of the New Testament and Christ's own life and actions. Psalms also offer consolation, wisdom, meditation, philosophy, and even advice about justice and mercy. They provide exemplars for how Christian men and women should be a part of the Church and how they should offer praise to God. Of course, in future centuries, the Church would severely restrict the translation of scripture into vernacular tongues and to do so was not only heretical, regardless of your skill or the result, but an infraction that was punished with excommunication or death.

In the *Benedictine Rule*, Chapters 9 through 18 establish a detailed schedule of psalmody for Opus Dei, and other passages explicitly dictate that monks, nuns, and oblates should devote much of their reading and meditation time to the study of the psalms in Latin. In Chapter 8, for instance, Benedict advises continuous study of the psalter whenever time permits, a key

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<sup>26</sup> *The Vespasian Psalter*, ed. Sherman M Kuhn (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1965), 299.



component of the important practice of *lectio divina*: “Quod vero restat post vigiliis a fratribus qui psalterii vel lectionum aliquid indigent meditationi inserviatur” [The time that remains after Vigils should be spent in meditation by those brothers who still need to memorize some part of the psalter or readings].<sup>27</sup> And in Chapter 24, Benedict prescribes a rather unique form of punishment that highlights the importance of the psalms in monastic environments: “Privati autem a mensæ consortio ista erit ratio, ut in oratorio psalmum aut antefanam non imponat, neque lectionem recitet, usque ad satisfactionem” [The following shall be the practice respecting one who is excluded from the common table: that he does not intone a psalm or an antiphon nor read a lesson in the oratory until he hath made satisfaction]. To be cut off from the psalms is to be severed from the foundation of English Christianity. Alfred’s translation is an attempt to make sure that this bare minimum of religious education was available to a wider audience than ever before in Anglo-Saxon England.

Illiterate lay audiences, if they had memorized anything of scripture, were most familiar with the psalms and it is clear from his translation strategies that Alfred had this particular audience in mind for his prose version. Throughout, he strives to render the potentially unclear or unfamiliar elements of the verses in simple prose, often adding additional information. Whether he

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<sup>27</sup> Quotations of the Rule are from *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN, 1981).

is trying to help a reader understand transitions between speakers or inserting a clause for emphasis, Alfred is keenly aware that he is handling holy writ; and despite orthodox restrictions against liberal or even sense-for-sense translation methodologies, the king chooses clarity over fidelity.

Asser is our only source for information about the king's own devotion to the psalms. He writes about this topic in his *Life of King Alfred*, Chapter 76:

Divina quoque ministeria et missam scilicet cotidie audire,  
psalmos quosdam et orationes et horas diurnas et nocturnas  
celebrare, et ecclesias nocturno tempore.... Divinam quoque  
scripturam a recitantibus indigenis....<sup>28</sup>

He was also in the invariable habit of listening daily to divine services and mass, and of participating in certain psalms and prayers and in the day-time and night-time offices.... He was also in the habit of listening eagerly and attentively to Holy Scripture being read out by his own countrymen....<sup>29</sup>

Although it is best to be wary of taking Asser at his word on every detail of Alfred's life and habits, he is very consistent about relating the king's spiritual devotion and love for scripture – and literature in general.<sup>30</sup> The king may not

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<sup>28</sup> Asser's *Life of King Alfred: together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser: De Rebus gestis Aelfredi*, eds. William Henry Stevenson and Dorothy Whitelock, (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 59.

<sup>29</sup> Translation is from *Alfred the Great*, Keynes and Lapidge, 91.

<sup>30</sup> In this same chapter, Asser reports, for example, his famous assertion that Alfred "did not refrain from....reading aloud from books in English and above all learning English poems by heart." The

have been a scholar or theologian, but his respect for the sanctity of scripture and the counsel from his enclave of ecclesiasts, would have demanded strict study of the psalms, as well as attention to whatever resources were available that might improve his interpretive and translation techniques.

### C. Textual and Hermeneutic Sources

Despite the popularity of the psalms within the culture, and the concomitant tradition of psalter commentary and glossing, the translator's task with the *Prose Psalms* is so unique that there exist no neat, tidy models to serve as a guide. And even if there had, it is possible that King Alfred, even with a coterie of helpers, lacked the level of scholarly nuance to take full advantage of such resources. The patristic fathers had written extensively on the psalms, however, and at least portions or epitomes of some of these exegetical texts were in circulation in Anglo-Saxon England. Thus is it important to form an idea of the background from which the *Prose Psalms* stand out. Also, there are important links between these analogues and potential sources that will help highlight the king's commitment to translation *and* interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

The *Romanum* psalter used by Alfred as the base for his translation and interpretation seems to date to sometime before the ninth century, a fact suggested by the absence of interpretations commonly found in later *Romanum*

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Latin original reads "impedimenta...Saxonicos libros recitare, et maxime carmina Saxonica memoriter discere."

<sup>31</sup> The term "paraphrast" is preferred by O'Neill in "The Prose Translation of Psalms 1-50," and I use it here for that reason but also to provide a synonym for "translator" to prevent overuse.

psalters, as well as the addition of readings existing in other early English psalters. However, the paraphrast was also using a copy of a *Gallicanum* psalter commentary, as shown by 140 agreements.<sup>32</sup> Most of the translator's interpretations that coincide with the *Gallicanum* are at places where the *Romanum* is particularly difficult or obscure. It is not common practice in this early period for psalter glosses or commentaries – let alone full-fledged translations – to intertwine source texts in order to present potentially less problematic interpretations of individual psalms. There are even some examples where the king seems to be drawing on slight knowledge of the *Hebraicum* and the *Vetus Latina*, two of the oldest editions of the psalms, although other reasons for these correspondences might also exist.<sup>33</sup> I will examine some examples of this habit later on.

The most popular Psalter commentaries rarely offer paraphrases of entire psalms; instead their explanations provide selective information on particular psalms. One of the most complete Latin commentaries is Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, which offers very detailed, but highly philosophical, exposition on a great many of the psalms. However, his discursive style, and intense focus on various levels of allegorical exegesis, seems not to have informed Alfred's translation choices as much as might be expected. Similarly, Jerome's commentaries, *Tractatus siue Homiliae in Psalmos* and *Commentarioli in*

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>33</sup> King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms, 33-4.

*Psalmos* are “especially disappointing” when considered as possible sources for the monarch’s interpretive angles<sup>34</sup>: despite the Latin father’s wide-ranging translation habits, these commentaries are incomplete and too selective to have been useful to Alfred. Pseudo-Jerome’s *Breviarium in Psalmos*, a conflation of Jerome’s two commentaries and other allegorical treatises, were especially popular early in the Middle Ages and thus this text may have served as a vehicle for Jerome’s thoughts rather than the patristic father’s actual writings. However, there are instances where Alfred employs readings excluded from Jerome but present in the *Breviarium*, hinting at greater access or even preference. Cassiodorus’ *Expositio in Psalmos* is a definite source for some of the paraphrast’s efforts, since some of his favored interpretations are drawn directly from the patristic figures exegesis. The *Expositio* was available in England at an early date and it adhered structurally to a verse-by-verse commentary, similar to the organization of the *Prose Psalms*. It is important to note that it had a *Romanum* psalter as its base, the same psalter identified by scholars as the source of the *Paris Psalter*.<sup>35</sup> Cassiodorus’ commentary was heavily informed by Augustine’s, so any echoes of the latter’s readings in the *Prose Psalms* might be traced back to *Expositio in Psalmos*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> O’Neill, “The Prose Translation of Psalms 1-50,” 260.

<sup>35</sup> O’Neill, “Chapter 3: The Sources” in *King Alfred’s Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, 31-4.

<sup>36</sup> See, in particular, Chapter 14, where Cassiodorus lays out his method of allegorical interpretation: “Tertio: arcanum psalmi, partim secundum spiritalem intellegentiam, secundam historicam lectionem, partim secundum mysticum sensum, subtilitates rerum discutiens proprietatesque verborum, prout concessum fuerit, conabor aperire” [Third, I will try to disclose

Four other key sources for the paraphrast's efforts with the *Prose Psalms* relate specifically to the translator's chosen mode, or rather modes, of exegesis. These authorities are Bede, Pseudo-Bede, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and an Irish deviation from the regular fourfold *argumenta*. While there are occasional word-for-word renderings of Latin psalms into prosaic Old English, the king more often relies on a set of interpretative guidelines. These principles are broadcast in the Old English Introduction to each psalm, ingenuous hermeneutic apparatuses that weave together personal and traditional interpretations of biblical passages to direct readers in their journey through the attached psalm. Except for Psalms 1, 21, and 26, all the West Saxon Psalms are preceded by these *argumenta*, and analyses of sources, interpretations, and lexical parallels reveal that the translator of the psalms is also responsible for the Introductions.<sup>37</sup> In the Paris Psalter manuscript, the Introductions come before the Latin *tituli* and extend across the top of both columns that make up the page, indicating their importance in the translator's strategy. The eleventh-century Vitellius Psalter, although badly damaged by fire, contains copies of these *argumenta* in the margins that serve as proof of continued interest in the *Prose Psalms* centuries after their composition.

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the secret meaning of the Psalm, resolving the subtleties of things and the properties of words, partly according to the spiritual understanding, partly according to the historical reading, partly according to the mystical sense, as has been granted]. Quoted from Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994), 200.

<sup>37</sup> O'Neill, "The Old English Introductions to the Prose Psalms of the Paris Psalter: Sources, Structure and Composition," *Studies in Philology* 78 (1981), 20-38, especially at 20-26.

Biblical interpretation in the medieval period revolved around a fourfold division of meaning: these levels are known in Latin as *argumenta*. The four exegetical *argumenta* are generally classified as literal/historical, mystical/Christological, moral/tropological, and anagogical. Literal/historical deals with the narrative; mystical/Christological with prophecy or eschatology, moral/tropological with appropriate behavior, and the anagogical with “the intimation of eternal truths.”<sup>38</sup> These *argumenta* were passed down to Anglo-Saxon writers and thinkers through the writings of the patristic fathers, especially Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Isidore, and Gregory.<sup>39</sup> The study of sacred scripture was considered the greatest literary calling and exegetical standards and techniques spread out from centers of learning like that at Canterbury, under the direction of Theodore and Hadrian.<sup>40</sup> These two ecclesiasts were advocates and practitioners of the Antiochene school of biblical exegesis, originating at a school headed by the rhetor Libanius in the late fourth century, which focused on the literal/historical level of meaning in holy writ. This methodology did not exclude the other levels, but it did lessen their importance by positioning longer, more detailed historical interpretations first

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<sup>38</sup> O’Neill, “The Prose Translation of Psalms 1-50,” 263. There is a lot scholarship out there on the fourfold levels of exegesis. Perhaps the best of them is *Medieval Exegesis: the Four Senses of Scripture* by Henri de Lubac (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2009), especially the introduction and first chapter of volume 1. For a more recent overview, try Thomas O’Loughlin’s *Early Medieval exegesis in the Latin West: Sources and Forms* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Again, there is a great deal of information available about the exegetical habits of the patriarch’s. For a solid account of each scholar’s contributions, see Charles Kannengiesser’s very thorough *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: the Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge provide a good history and overview of Theodore’s and Hadrian’s exegetical style in *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

and by relying on philological means of textual excavation. The greatest “rival” to Antiochene exegesis was that practiced by adherents to the older Alexandrine school of hermeneutics, which stressed the importance of allegorical interpretation. Clement of Alexandria is recognized as the progenitor of this methodology, with Origen as his most famous student.<sup>41</sup>

Anglo-Saxons had access to commentaries and glosses that were products of both of these systems, but the translator of the *Prose Psalms* is clearly more influenced by Antiochene exegesis. This is indicated by the inclusion of not one but two historical interpretations, usually substituting a second historical reading for the anagogical. The Introduction to Psalm 15 is a typical representation of Alfred’s habits.

- 1 Þone fifteoðan sealm Dauid sang be his earfoðum, ægðer ge  
modes ge lichaman;
- 2 and eft swa ilce Ezechias hine sang be his mettrumnesse,  
wilnode him to Gode sumre frofre;
- 3 and swa deð ælc rihtwis mann þe hine singþ on his earfoþum;
- 4 and swa dyde Crist þa he hine sang.

David sang the fifteenth psalm about his difficulties, both mental and physical; and likewise Ezechias sang it about his illness,

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<sup>41</sup> For more on Clement, see Eric Francis Osborn’s *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), especially Chapter 3, 56-80. To learn more about Origen’s interpretative methods, see *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (New York: De Gruyter, 1986) by Karen Jo Torjesen.



desiring for himself some relief from God; and so does every  
righteous man who sings it in his troubles; and so did Christ when  
he sang it.

In this example, and in most other psalms, *argumentum* 1 serves as an exposition of the literal/historical content of the text, focusing on the narrative itself. *Argumentum* 3 is mystical in that it is Christological in its interpretation – Alfred almost always substitutes a Christological reading for the more traditional mystical sense. And in *argumentum* 4, the paraphrast aligns his reading with the traditional extension of the Christological significance: whatever is good enough for the Savior is good enough for all (all good Christians, that is). It is in *argumentum* 2 that Alfred's hermeneutics split from orthodox exegesis. Instead of anagogical or allegorical significance, he offers another historical interpretation, in Psalm 15 by linking Ezechias' lamenting with David's.

Privileging of the Davidic clause is born out in the rest of the *Prose Psalms*: whenever he can, in fact, the king connects his interpretive scheme back to David. In fact, other translations from Alfred's canon provide further evidence that the king saw the Old Testament monarch as model for his own life and actions. The important role of David in Alfred's rendering of the Psalms cannot be overstated. While other medieval writers were clearly aware of the Old Testament figure's crucial status as a primary author of these verses, they did not cede to him sole authorship of every Psalm. Thus, Alfred's

“exclusive designation of David as author of all the Psalms (the first fifty) is remarkable, made all the more so by the appropriation to David in the second half of the Introductions of the role of foretelling (and uttering) the other three interpretations.”<sup>42</sup> The English monarch no doubt noticed the affinities he shared with his Old Testament predecessor: both were under attack from outsiders, both valued eloquence, and both were on educational missions. Robert Stanton suggests, however, that while “Alfred derived great energy and purpose from his analogy between himself and David,” he “clearly did not want to push it to the extent of a too direct, possibly blasphemous, parallelism involving Christ and himself.”<sup>43</sup>

The primary filter for patristic exegetical practices during the Anglo-Saxon period is the Venerable Bede. The bulk of Bede’s extant corpus is dedicated to biblical exegesis, with Old Testament commentaries on Genesis, parts of Exodus (Chapters XXXIV-XXX, also known as *De tabernaculo*), parts of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles (or *De templo Salomonis*), Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and even the minor figure Habakkuk. Concerning the New Testament, Bede wrote popular commentaries on the gospels Mark and Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Epistles, seven Catholic Epistles, and Revelation.<sup>44</sup> Most of Bede’s commentaries are compilations of opinions held by

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>43</sup> *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, 126.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed overview of Bede’s exegetical methodologies and commentaries, see C. Jenkins, “Bede as Exegete and Theologian,” in *Bede, His Life, Times, and Writings*, ed. A. H. Thompson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 152-200. Also, for more on Bede’s commentaries, read Roger Ray,

the Latin fathers, and sometimes his texts are just collections of quotes from primary sources. Augustine is Bede's hermeneutic mentor, as is evident, for example, from the latter's direct quotation of *De Genesi ad Litteram libri duodecim* in *De tabernaculo*. However, in Bede scholars already see a penchant for literal interpretations of scripture that will become a recognizable characteristic of almost all Old English exegesis. Michael Lapidge asserts, "By nature Bede favours philological and historical exposition and avoids the wilder excesses of allegorical interpretation. He prefers to interpret a biblical text literally, and will only attempt to extract an allegorical interpretation when he feels justified in so doing by recourse to other biblical texts."<sup>45</sup> If you replace "Bede" with "Alfred," you have an accurate assessment of the *Prose Psalms'* treatment of the allegorical level of meaning. However, as the translation of Psalm 2 witnesses, Alfred occasionally deviates even from the orthodox Antiochene interpretation of particular psalms. Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary accepts the second psalms's prophetic provenance, and he writes "Beatus dauid prophetans narrat Omnia quae a Iudaeis passionis dominicae impleta sunt tempore" [Blessed David in prophecy narrates all the things that were carried out by the Jews at

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"What do we Know about Bede's Commentaries," in *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 49 (1982), 5-20.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Lapidge, "Chapter 1: Anglo-Latin Literature," in *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600-899* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), 16.

the time of the Lord's passion].<sup>46</sup> The paraphrast, however, does not make this same claim in his *argumentum*.

While Bede doubtless served as a general exemplar, it is from Pseudo-Bede that Alfred extracts a number of interpretations for his Introductions. In *Argumenta*, probably compiled in Ireland sometime during the seventh century, Pseudo-Bede postulates a set of two, or occasionally three, interpretations for each Psalm. *Argumentum* (a) applies to the historical level, (b) to the mystical level, and (c) to either the mystical or the historical. The Introduction to Psalm 22 is a good example of this arrangement:

(a) Reditum populi de Babylone praedicat, enumerans quantis

redeuntes in itinere solatiis usi sunt Dei, quanta post

reuersionem rerum ubertate donate.

(b) Item, uox ecclesiae post baptismum; ad Hester.

(c) Aliter, quia in xxi. Psalmo habuimus tribulationem passionis,

in xxii. Laetitiam resurrectionis accepimus.<sup>47</sup>

(a) He predicts the return of the [Jewish] people from Babylon,

listing the number of comforts from God they enjoyed on the

way as they returned, what wealth of things they were granted

after the return; (b) likewise, the voice of the Church after

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted from L. De Coninck, ed., *Theodori Mopsuesteni Expositionis in Psalmos, Iuliano Aeclanensi in Latinum Uersae quae supersunt*, CCSL 88A (Turnhout, 1977), 10.1-2.

<sup>47</sup> *Liber Psalmorum: The West Saxon Psalms*, 47. This edition also includes a copy of Pseudo-Bede's *Argumenta*.

baptism; to Hester; (c) Alternatively, since in Ps 21 we had the suffering of the Passion, in Ps 22 we received the joy of the resurrection.<sup>48</sup>

Alfred does not cling to the organization offered by Pseudo-Bede, however: for example, the *Argumenta* does not often include moral or Christological clauses, so the translator had to resort to other hermeneutic means for these interpretations. Predictably, he chooses to model them on the initial Davidic clause, as he does in Psalm 9 when, referring to David offering thanks to God for helping him with his troubles, for the moral clause he writes “and on þa ylcan gerad hine singþ ælc rihtwis mann be his sylfes feondum” [And every just man in the same kind of situation sings the psalm about his own enemies].

Bright and Ramsay are credited with one of the earliest revelations about Alfred’s hermeneutic methods for the *Prose Psalter*. They discovered that his idiosyncratic adaptation of the traditional fourfold *argumenta* is attested in an Irish Psalter commentary, *The Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter*. Here is a summary of this system from the Irish source:

There are four things that are necessary for [understanding] the Psalms, that is, the first historical interpretation, and the second historical interpretation, the mystical meaning, and the moral meaning. The first historical interpretation [refers] to David and to

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<sup>48</sup> Translation is from O’Neill, “The Prose Translation of Psalms 1-50,” 265.

Solomon and to the above-mentioned persons, to Saul, Absalom, to the persecutors generally. The second historical interpretation [refers] to Ezechias, to the [Jewish] people, to the Maccabees. The mystical meaning [refers] to Christ, to the earthly and heavenly Church; the moral meaning to every holy person.<sup>49</sup>

The Irish system aligns neatly with the king's predilection for Anthiochene emphasis on the literal/historical level of meaning, but, again, his translations do not simply copy this style. For one, the *Psalterium Romanum* is unattested in Irish commentaries and psalters; for another, the king does not hold the Irish exegetical order. Instead of structuring his Introductions as first and second historical, mystical, and then moral, Alfred chooses instead the more traditional pattern. O'Neill explains, "of the thirty Introductions with a fourfold scheme, twenty follow the sequence of first historical, second historical, moral, and mystical; of the fifteen with a threefold plan, twelve follow the order of first historical, moral, and mystical."<sup>50</sup> To best understand the king's distinctive adaptation of existing exegetical *argumenta*, the Irish system needs to be placed

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 264. Here is the original Irish text, from Kuno Meyer, ed., *Hibernica Minora*, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Medieval and Modern Series 8 (Oxford, 1894), 30-31: "Atá cetharde as toiscide isnaib salmaib .i. cétna stoir ocus stoir tánaise, síens ocus morolus. Cétna stoir fri Duíd ocus fri Solomon ocus frisna persanna remépertha, fri Saúl, fri Abisolón, frisna hingrintide, olchena. Stoir tánaise fri Ezechiam, frisin popul, frisna Machabda. Síens fri Críst, frisin n-eclais talmandai ocus nemdai. Morolusri eech nóib."

<sup>50</sup> O'Neill, "The Old English Introductions to the Prose Psalms of the Paris Psalter: Sources, Structure, and Composition," 36-37.

alongside the “the most influential and representative” model of biblical exegesis, developed by Augustine of Hippo.<sup>51</sup>

Augustine is often credited with the first statement of the fourfold plurality of meaning inherent in scriptural writing. His paradigm, repeated – with minor alterations – throughout his corpus and transmitted to the heart of Christian scholarship and education, was the model for the vast majority of other exegetes and hermeneuts, before, during, and after the Anglo-Saxon period. He writes in the opening of *De Genesi ad Litteram libri duodecim*:

Omnis divina Scriptura bipartita est, ... quae duo etiam Testamenta dicuntur. In Libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet quae ibi aeterna intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura praenuntientur, quae agenda praecipiantur vel admoneantur.

Sacred Scripture, taken as a whole, is divided into two parts.... These new and old things are also called testaments. In all the sacred books, we should consider the eternal truths that are taught, the facts that are narrated, the future events that are predicted, and the precepts or counsels that are given.

The paragraph starts by describing the four senses of meaning in scripture and then ends with a defense of figural interpretation, although Gregory will eventually become the patristic champion of allegorical exegesis. Augustine

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 27.

defines the anagogical level as *aeterna intimentur* [eternal truths], the literal/historical as *facta narrentur* [narrated facts], the allegorical/mystical level as *future praenuntientur* [future events], and the tropological/moral as *agenda praecipiantur uel admoneantur* [advisable precepts or counsels]. The Irish system abandons the anagogical, the allegorical, and doubles down on the importance of *facta narrentur*, hinting at the extreme value of the words and their most obvious denotations.<sup>52</sup> Alfred, however, prefers to maintain a sequence that follows Augustine's suggested order, while also ridding his interpretations of an allegorical perspective. This is one of the factors that makes the king's paraphrase of the psalms so unique, blending as it does several major traditions of psalm commentary and biblical exegesis in the few lines of the Introductions.

#### D. Stylistic Translation Examples

There are several other linguistic features of the *Prose Psalms* that stand out and indicate both the purposes for which the translator envisioned his work being put and the implementation of a holistic strategy conflating

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<sup>52</sup> In a different treatise, *De utilitate credenda*, Augustine expands on his definitions, using Greek terminology to do so: "5. Secundum historiam ergo traditur, cum docetur quid scriptum, aut quid gestum sit; quid non gestum, sed tantummodo scriptum quasi gestum sit. Secundum aetiologiam, cum ostenditur quid qua de causa vel factum vel dictum sit. Secundum analogiam, cum demonstratur non sibi adversari duo Testamenta Vetus et Novum. Secundum allegoriam, cum docetur non ad litteram esse accipienda quaedam quae scripta sunt, sed figurate intellegenda" [Thus (for example) it is handed down according to history, when there is taught what has been written, or what has been done; what not done, but only written as though it had been done. According to ætiology, when it is shown for what cause any thing has been done or said. According to analogy, when it is shown that the two Testaments, the Old and the New, are not contrary the one to the other. According to allegory, when it is taught that certain things which have been written are not to be taken in the letter, but are to be understood in a figure].



interpretation and translation. The Introductions and many expansions or insertions serve a pedagogical need, elaborating on foreign material for an uninitiated audience. Sometimes these clarifying comments are prefaced by the signal phrase “*þæt is*”; in other cases, Alfred inserts a clause directly before or after the verse in question. Stylistically, the king relies on linguistic habits established in his other translations, the most common of which is doubling, or the translation of a single Latin word in the source by a pair of synonymous or near-synonymous Old English terms. Unlike the interlinear glosses, which are loyalistic word-for-word renderings of the psalms and can serve as cribs, the paraphrast adapts the original to the standards and norms of vernacular syntax. And in contrast to the translator of the metrical psalms, Alfred betrays no obligation to attempt to transform Latin verse into poetical Anglo-Saxon, thereby evading the difficult position of being caught between pedagogic clarity and poetic sensibility.

This is not to suggest that Alfred ignores rhythm or the musicality of words, in the Latin or the Old English. The translation is not of simple workmanlike quality and shows a care for evoking imagery and emotions in readers through the use of deliberate word- and phrase-choice. See, for example, the opening lines of Psalm 1, which require no translation to render their poetic strengths: “*Eadig byð se wer þe ne gæð on geþeaht unrihtwisra, ne on þam wege ne stent synfulra, ne on heora wolbærendum setle ne sitt.*” The lyricism in these lines is strong, perhaps even more driven than that of the

original because of the alliterative underpinnings, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon verse and Alfred's other translations.

Nonetheless, one could almost choose a passage at random from the metrical division of the psalms and easily discern the translator's attention to alliteration, rhythm, and even meter. The use of these traditional features might help explain why copies of metrical psalms make appearances in three other manuscripts besides the Paris Psalter. Toswell claims "[t]his frequency of survival, in comparison to other Old English poems (and indeed with other known Old English texts in general), suggests that the metrical psalter was a well-known version of this book of the Bible in late Anglo-Saxon England."<sup>53</sup> Within the context of the Paris Psalter, however, the prose translation is the dominant text, despite the poetic qualities of psalms 51-150. Occasionally, the Old English metrical version even surpasses the techniques of its sacrosanct source. For example, Psalm 64.11 is translated as

Wæter yrnende    wæstme tyddrað;  
mænige on moldan    manna cynnes  
on cneorisse    cende weorðað,  
and blissiað,    blowað and growað  
þurh dropunge    deawes and renes.

Compare this to the Latin psalm: "rivos eius inebrians, multiplicans generations eius; in stillicidiis suis laetabitur dum exorietur" [fill up those

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<sup>53</sup> Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 307.

streams, multiply those generations; in showers it will rise up and rejoice]. The poet-translator conflates the original, transforming a rather straightforward statement comprised of twelve words into a beautiful, natural image that requires twice as many terms. The translator relies on the characteristic doubling to balance the lines and create symmetry not present in the source text. Repetition of “að” links the first line with lines 2 and 3, while the use of “es” in the final line extends the lyricism. Each line also maintains its own alliteration, even if not always adhering to the standards of traditional Old English metrics. Readers with less of a scholarly or philological interest in the psalms would have been attracted to the metrical translation, so in this way the versifier attracted an audience. However, of the two, the metrical translation contains more instances of mistranslation—one scholar characterizes the versifier as a “frequent offender” in the area of misinterpretation because of a “penchant for making up words to fit the alliteration” and “frequent use of Biblical commentary on the psalms rather than any version of the Latin psalter as a basis for translation.”<sup>54</sup>

King Alfred makes his own share of mistakes and these should not be overlooked before discussing the merits of his translation efforts. One such minor error occurs in the Introduction to Psalm 25, when, in his second *argumentum*, the king inserts a comment about the Assyrians proclaiming their

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<sup>54</sup> John D. Tinkler, *Vocabulary and Syntax of the Old English Version in the Paris Psalter* (The Hague: Mouton & Co. N.V., Publishers, 1971), 88.

innocence alongside persecuted Jews. This seems to be the result of a confusion between the Babylonian period of captivity and Salmanasar's kidnapping of the Ten Tribes in 2 Kings 17.<sup>55</sup> More often Alfred's "mistakes" take the form of omissions of Latin words, phrases, or even entire clauses. An early instance is at Psalm 4.5, where he omits a rendering for "in cubilibus uestris" but translates the context, "quae dicitis in cordibus uestris et in cubilibus uestris compungimini" [the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds] with "and þæt unriht þæt ge smeagað on ewerum mode, forlætað and hreowsiað þæs" [and the wrong that you consider in your mind, suffer and grieve for this]. This is one of only two mentions of the heart – one of the central organs for Anglo-Saxon psychologies, according to Leslie Lockett – that the king overlooks.<sup>56</sup> In another example, at Psalm 34.8, "adprehendat eos et in laqueum incidant in idipsum" [overtake them and they fall into the same trap] is not included in Alfred's rendering of the psalm, perhaps because the verse's opening, "veniat illis laqueus quem ignorant" [let the trap he does not know fall upon him], has already stated these ideas, though the king is content to include repetitious translations at other points. And in Psalm 22.7, the paraphrast supplies "Drihten, hu mære þin folc nu is: ælce dæge hit symblað" [Lord, how great your folk now are: each day they feast] for the Latin "et poculum tuum inebrians quam praeclarum est" [and your inebriating cup, how

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<sup>55</sup> See O'Neill, *King Alfred Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, 213.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the heart, see *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*, 54-109.

excellent it is], apparently misreading “poculum” as “populum.” Alfred is not a perfect translator, by any means, but he is far more careful and exacting in his rendering of the psalms than the versifier is. Furthermore, despite a few additions or manipulations of the source for interpretive purposes, the metrical psalms lack the hermeneutic apparatus and pedagogical insights that make the prose psalms essential for personal devotion and fascinating as an example of Anglo-Saxon biblical translation.

Of all the recurring linguistic strategies of the paraphrast, doublets are the most common, with over two hundred examples appearing throughout the *Prose Psalms*.<sup>57</sup> Vernacular glossators were using word pairs before Alfred entered the literary scene in Anglo-Saxon England, and if he was at all familiar with that extensive genre, the king and his advisors, who were most certainly acquainted with this genre, would have noticed this stylistic technique. Its efficacy as an instrument for adding meaning and emphasis is what makes it such a popular device for many vernacular writers. Doubling appears right away, with the first instance in Psalm 1.3, when the Latin “folium” [foliage] is translated as “his leaf and his blæda” [his leaf and his blade]. Another instance of doubling that seems repetitive, if not unnecessary because of its pseudo-lyrical qualities, is in Psalm 2.6, where the Latin original uses “praeceptum” [precept] and the translator chooses “his willan and his æ” [his will and his

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<sup>57</sup> O’Neill makes this claim in his dissertation, “The Old-English Prose Psalms of the Paris Psalter” (University of Pennsylvania, 1980), 91.

law]. This habit is not the result of a paucity of lexical choices in the vernacular: quite the opposite, actually, as this technique requires more terms from Old English. Besides showcasing his own skill, the paraphrast is also broadcasting the flexibility of his vernacular tongue and proclaiming its utility for handling the philosophical and theological vocabulary that made Latin the prestige language for centuries.

Alfred also commonly uses doublets as vehicles for poetic alliterations, depositing micro-lyrics amidst solid, careful prose. For example, in Psalm 24.8, when the Latin describes God as “*dulcis*” [sweet], Alfred translates “*swete and wynsom*” [sweet and winsome], alternatively repeating “*s*” and “*w*.” He does this again in Psalm 17.31 and 37, expanding the Latin “*uirtute*” [power] with the alliterative phrase “*mid mægum and mid cræftum*” [with might and with power]. An early use of alliterative doubling, in Psalm 7.10, has the translator substituting “*gerece and geræd*” [arrange and advised] for the Latin “*dirige*” [direct]. This is the first example of a pattern wherein the paraphrast chooses word pairs with shared prefixes. He does so again in Psalm 26.14. The Latin original uses the term “*confortetur*” [become stronger] and this gets rendered as “*gestapela and gestranga*” [set and make stronger], repeating some consonant and vowel sounds. A final example: in Psalm 48.21, the Latin psalmist writes “*honore*” [honor] but the paraphrast selects “*welan and weorðscipe*” [wealth and worship].

Verbs are among the paraphrast's favorite words for doubling, and this habit begins in Psalm 4.5, where the Latin reads "compungimini" [be sorry for] and the paraphrast expands this with "forlætað and hreowsiað" [suffer and lament]. In Psalm 7.17, the Latin verse uses "psallam" [sing] but the translator amends this expression to "herie...and lofige" [praise...and laud]. Similarly, the single Latin verb "pronuntiabo" [will proclaim] in Psalm 31.6 is doubled by "andettan and stælan" [will confess and declare]. Using extra verbs infuses the prose lines with more energy and allows the paraphrast to integrate a recognizable feature of Anglo-Saxon writing into the most commonly-read book of the Bible in this time period.

One intriguing pattern about Alfred's doubling that has attracted some scholarly attention is the linking together of corporeal and non-corporeal terms when translating Latin words related to body parts. This habit begins in Psalm 7.10, where the Latin claims God peers into "corda et renes" [heart and kidneys]. The paraphrast changes this to "heortan and ædra and manna gepohtas" [heart and kidneys and a man's thoughts], turning the connotations of the Latin into denotations. While some conservative scholars might argue that doubling is as inefficient as it is unfaithful, the practice can also be viewed as an implicit declaration on the impossibility of one-to-one translation. And rather than leave their translation version bereft of the potential for whatever range of meanings were made possible by a single word in their source, Anglo-Saxon translators instead chose to take a risk and try to use vocabulary that

better indicates that potential.

Another interpretive doublet is employed in Psalm 8.8, where the Latin reads “sub pedibus eius” [under his feet]. The paraphrast starts with a literal translation but then adds a figural term that expands on the implications of the source text: “under his fet and under his anwald” [under his feet and under his rule]. In Psalm 39.14, Alfred translates “min heorte and mine mod” [my heart and my spirit] for the original Latin, “cor meum” [my heart]. Again, he renders the figurative level of his source text in plain Old English to assist unskilled readers. Two other Latin terms, “os(sa)” [mouth] and “brach(ium)” [arm], also receive this treatment. At Psalm 6.2, Alfred renders “for þam eall min mægn and eal min ban synt gebrytt and gedrefed” [for all my might and all my bones are broken and troubled] for the Latin “quoniam conturbata sunt omnia ossa mea” [for my bones are troubled]. In another example, from Psalm 31.3, the paraphrast translates the Latin “inueterauerunt omnia ossa mea” [my bones grew old] with “eal min ban and min mægen forealdode” [all my bones and my might grow old]. The final example with these terms is in Psalm 9.35. The Latin uses “brachium” but the paraphrast writes “þone earm and þæt mægen” [the arm and the might]. The word “os” attracts an unusual amount of attention from Alfred: in three instances when he encounters it in the psalms, Alfred translates the term but then appends an interpretive statement announced by the phrase “þæt is.” For example, at Psalm 33.20, the Latin reads “omnia ossa eorum” [all their bones], and the paraphrast renders it “eall heora ban, þæt ys



eall heora mægen” [all their bones, that is, all their might]. This pattern is copied and applied at Psalm 34.11, when Alfred writes “eall min ban, þæt is min mægen” [all my bones, that is, my might].

A more extensive insertion, however, is found in Psalm 21.15, when the paraphrast writes “Hy þurhdulfon mine handa and mine fet and gerimdon eall min ban, þæt ys, min mægn. And mine getrywan frynd, þam ic getruwode swa wel swa minum agenum limum” [It pierced my hands and my feet and numbered all my bones, that is, my might. And my trusted friend, whom I entrusted as much as my own limb]. This expands on the original, which reads “Sicut aqua effusa sunt et dispersa sunt omnia ossa mea et factum est cor meum tamquam cera liquefiens in medio ventris mei” [I am poured out like water; and all my bones are scattered. My heart is become like wax melting in the midst of my bowels]. In a rare move, the king seems to want to avoid the idiomatic depiction of the heart here, although it is hard to understand why he would deviate so much from scripture when the original imagery would have been right at home among Old English linguistic accounts for the cardiac system. He imports imagery related to Christ’s crucifixion, however, perhaps intending to elicit a more intense response from readers.

There are also other cases where the paraphrast employs doubling for the sake of either emphasizing a point not made clear in the Latin or inserting exegetical details gleaned from commentary tradition. These instances are more than just asides since they often give readers access to knowledge sources

almost certainly out of their reach and understanding. For example, in Psalm 17.21, the original reads “Quia custodivi vias Domini nec impie gessi a Deo meo” [Because I have kept the ways of the Lord; and have not done wickedly against my God]. Alfred translates the word “impie” with the doubled phrase “ne dyde arleaslice ne unhyrsumlice” [not done impiously or disobediently], departing from the literal meaning of the Latin verse for emphasis. The paraphrast does this again at Psalm 40.8, when he translates “cogitabant mala mihi” [they imagined evils for me] with “þohton me yfeles and spræcon me yfeles” [thought up evils for me and spoke evils to me]. Not only are his enemies against him in thought but also in action, which is beyond the implications of the Latin text. The most striking case of this kind of insertion, though not always heralded by doubling, is Psalm 44, where the king adopts many viewpoints expressed by Cassiodorus and Augustine and includes these in his translation of the psalm. It is also unusual for the king to depict David in the Introduction not simply as a narrator of events but also as a prophet, speaking “ymb Fæder and ymb Sunu and ymb þa halgan gesamnunga Cristenra manna geond ealre eorðan” [about the Father and about the Son and about the holy congregations of Christian men over all the Earth]. O’Neill comments that “The complexities inherent in a mystical interpretation are managed by explanatory glosses inserted after the literal translation.”<sup>58</sup> In the first line, the Latin offers “verbum bonum,” but the paraphrast translates this

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<sup>58</sup> O’Neill, *King Alfred’s Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, 254.

as “good Word, þæt ys, good Godes bearn” [good Word, that is, God’s good son]. This addition resembles Cassiodorus reading, “Verbum bonum, Filium Dei dicit.”<sup>59</sup> And in the second verse, where the Latin has “lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis,” Alfred renders “Þæt ys, Crist se ys word and tunge Godfæder; þurh hine synt ealle þincg geworht” [that is, Christ is the word and tongue of the Godfather; through him are all things wrought]. Both Cassiodorus and Augustine cite 1 John, verses 1 and 3 in their commentaries for Psalm 44, where the gospel reads “In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum.... Omnia per ipsum facta sunt” [In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by him]. Next, when translating the Latin “gladium tuum,” Alfred writes “sweord” but also adds “Þæt ys, gastlicu lar seo ys on ðam godspelle; seo ys scearpre þonne æni sweord” [that is, spiritual lore that is from the evangelist; it is sharper than any sword]. This reading shows influence, again, from Cassiodorus, who cites Ephesians 6.17.<sup>60</sup> There are eight other places in Psalm 44 where Alfred’s translation is far from literal, but neither is he taking undue liberties with his source for the sake of stylistic or even personal preferences: he is trying to ensure his readers have a firm understanding of this complex psalm and to do so he must integrate a variety of patristic sources.

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<sup>59</sup> *Magni Aurelii Cassiodori Expositio Psalmorum I-LXX*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 97 (1958), 403.50.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.97.

My favorite type of doublet occurs around a dozen times in the *Prose Psalms*—in these cases, Alfred translates a word from the Latin psalm with the orthodox term from the Romanum psalter and a second, alternative term from a non-Romanum psalter source. These doublets are particularly important because they bear witness to (a) the king’s access to and knowledge of multiple sources, (b) his ability to compare the different sources and decide not to occlude one or the other in certain instances, and (c) the extent to which he will push the boundaries of safe biblical translation for the sake of fulfilling his didactic mission. The first example of this pattern is at Psalm 11.4. Alfred supplies “þa oferspræcan and þa yfelspræcan” [over-speaking and evil-speaking], translating both “magniloquam” from the Gallicanum and “maliloquam” from the Romanum. The Romanum is the foundation for the bulk of the monarch’s text, but by placing the Gallicanum’s term first in this doublet, he seems to be granting its terminology authority over the more traditional Latin source. The Gallicanum does not become the psalter of choice in Anglo-Saxon England until the Benedictine Reform is in full swing, over a century after Alfred’s own lifetime.<sup>61</sup> There seems to be a higher concentration of this type of doubling in the latter half of the psalms, with fewer examples present in Psalms 1-23. There is even evidence that Alfred relied on the *Vetus Latina* version of the psalter: in Psalm 43.11, he writes “gegripað

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<sup>61</sup> Mechthild Gretsch writes about the Gallicanum’s role in the reform in Chapter 2 of *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 6-41.

and...gehrespað" [grips and...tears], including the Romanum and Gallicanum's preferred term, "diripiebant" [tear], and the older term, "deripiebant" [snatch] from the Vetus Latina. At Psalm 24.17, Alfred writes "to bræd and gemanigfealdod" [to broaden and to multiply] to accommodate, respectively, the Gallicanum "multiplicatae" and the Romanum "dilatatae." In Psalm 29.4, the monarch supplies "of neolnessum and of helle" [from a deep pit and from hell] for the Romanum's "ab inferis" and the Gallicanum's "ab inferno." And next, in one last example, Alfred renders the Romanum's "fortitudo" and Gallicanum's "virtus" with "min mægen and min strengo and min cræft" [my might and my strength and my craft].<sup>62</sup> Alfred's use of doublets in these occurrences exhibits a deep concern for fidelity to his sources, although not in a manner that modern readers might expect from medieval translators. Since both of the major psalters are respected sources and have their share of patristic supporters, Alfred does not see the need to always choose one or the other. By combining readings from both the Romanum and Gallicanum, the king is holding true to the parameters of his education reformation and offering a surprising wealth of knowledge to his readers, using short phrases to do so.

### **E. Structural Changes in Translation**

Unlike Augustine, the king is not confident that the meanings of the psalms will be clear to all good Christians who read them. The bishop of Hippo

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<sup>62</sup> A lot has been written on Alfred's evolving strategies for translating "virtus": see, for example, O'Neill, *King Alfred's Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, 70-71; also, Nicole Guenther Disenza, "Power, Skill, and Virtue in the Old English Boethius," *ASE* 26 (1997), 81-108.

proclaims this belief in his exposition on Psalm 44, which is ironic because this psalm vexed Alfred so much that he hardly left a line untouched interpretively:

In paucis versibus tam crebra mutatio personarum intellectum admonet: non exprimit locum ubi mutatur; non dicitur: Hoc dixit homo, hoc dixit Deus; sed ex ipsis verbis fit nobis intellegere quid ad hominem pertineat, quid ad Deum.

Such frequent switches within a few lines alert us to use our intelligence. The place where the speaker changes I noted; there is no indication, “Man says this; God says that”; but the words themselves make clear to us which belong to the human speaker, and which to God.<sup>63</sup>

Augustine’s commentaries are exhaustive, yes, but they are also aimed at an ecclesiastical audience who is fluent in Latin and has had some exposure to the long tradition of psalm commentary. While the statement above is not necessarily an elitist one, Alfred makes a different assumption about the natural ability of his target audience and adjusts his translation accordingly. There are many points within the psalms where speaker transitions are unclear or even lacking altogether and the paraphrast developed a number of clarification strategies for these troublesome transitions. Sometimes, this takes the form of a simple addition of “he cwæð,” as in Psalms 8, 18, 28, and 50,

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<sup>63</sup> Translation is from *Expositions of the Psalms: 33-50*, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990), 288.

where Alfred adds this clarifier between the Introduction and the psalm proper. At Psalm 11.8, to indicate a transition from God to David as speaker, Alfred inserts “cwæð Daid.” Variations on this formula appear throughout the psalms. For example, at Psalms 2.4, 9.34, he adds “cwæð se witega” [said the wise man]. And at Psalm 45.8, the paraphrast elaborates even more and inserts an entire sentence: “Pa andswarode God þæs witgan mode and cwæð eft þurh þone witgan” [Then God answered this prophet in spirit and said then through that wise man]. However, perhaps the most pedagogical clarification of this type appears in Psalm 14.2. The Latin version poses the question “Domine quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo aut quis requiescet in monte sancto tuo?” [Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? or who shall rest in thy holy hill?], which Alfred translates rather literally as “Drihten, hwa eardað on þinum temple, oððe hwa mot hine gerestan on þæm halgan munte?” [Lord, who dwells in your temple, or who may rest on your holy mount?]. However, he appends to this an extra explanation before rendering the answer: “Pa andswarode Drihten þæs witgan mode þurh onbryrdnesse þæs Halgan Gastes; and cwæð se witga: “Ic wat, þeah ic ahsige, hwa þær eardað: se þe ingæð butan wamme and wyrçð rihtwisnesse” [Then answered the Lord this prophet’s mind through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; and said the wise man: “I know, yet I ask, who lives there: he who enters without blot and works for righteousness]. This serves as a reminder to readers of the proper hierarchy between God and men, while also inflating David’s role in the psalms.

## F. Non-Literal Translation

Despite a long-standing tradition declaring word-for-word translation of Holy Writ as the only possible strategy for retaining any of its original – or divine – significance, Alfred occasionally departs from a literal rendering of the psalms to add his own lines of Old English. Psalm 3 provides some minor instances of this habit.<sup>64</sup> The Romanum version reads

4 tu autem Domine susceptor meus es gloria mea et exaltans  
caput meum

...

7 non timebo milia populi circumdantis me exsurge Domine  
salvum me fac Deus meus

4 But thou, O Lord are my protector, my glory, and the lifter up  
of my head.

...

7 I will not fear thousands of the people, surrounding me: arise,  
O Lord; save me, O my God.

Alfred offers this translation:

2) Ac hit nis na swa hy cweðað, ac þu eart butan ælcum tweon  
min fultum and min wuldor, and þu ahefst upp min heafod.

...

5) For ðam ic me nu na ondræde þusendu folces, þeah hi me utan  
ymbþringen. Ac ðu, Drihten, aris and gedo me halne, for þam  
þu eart min God.

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<sup>64</sup> Please note that Alfred's numbering does not strictly follow the Romanum's order but I include the original numbers for continuity's sake.



- 2) But it is not as they say: rather you without any doubt are my protection and my glory, and you lift up my head.

...

- 5) Therefore I do not now fear the thousands of the enemy peoples, even though they surround me from without; but you, O Lord, arise, and make me safe, for you are my God.

In the second line, he adds “Ac hit nis na swa hy cweðað,” presumably as an attempt to ease the transition between verses for his readers. And in the fifth line, he appends the closing statement “for þam þu eart min God,” for no immediately discernable purpose beyond emphasis. That choice in itself, however, pushes the paraphrast’s translation beyond the words of scripture and introduces an element of personal preference not present in any other Old English gloss on the psalm.<sup>65</sup>

In Psalm 9, Alfred effects more minor changes to the psalm as he makes his interpretations.

- 7 Inimici defecerunt frameae in finem et civitates destruxisti periit memoria eorum cum sonitu

...

- 13 Miserere mei Domine vide humilitatem meam de inimicis meis  
14 Qui exaltas me de portis mortis ut adnuntiem omnes  
    laudationes tuas in portis filiae Sion

- 7 The swords of the enemy have failed unto the end: and their cities you have destroyed. Their memory has perished with a

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<sup>65</sup> See Pulsiano, *Old English Glossed Psalters Psalms 1-50, 19-22*.

noise.

...

13 Have mercy on me, O Lord: see my humiliation which I suffer from my enemies.

14 You that lifted me up from the gates of death, that I may declare all your praises in the gates of the daughter of Sion.

6) Seo redelse and þæt geþeaht urra feonda geteorode, ða hi hit endian sceoldan, and heora [byrig] þu towurpe ealla.

...

13) Gemiltsa me, Drihten, and geseoh mine eaðmetto (hu earmne me habbað gedon mine fynd), for ðam þu eart se ylca God þe me uppahofe fram deaðes gatum, to þam þæt ic bodade eall þin lof on ðam geatum thære burge Hierusalem.

6) The plan and the scheme of our enemies has failed, when they ought to have brought it to completion; and you have destroyed all their cities.

...

13) Have mercy on me, O Lord, and look on my weakness, on how miserable my enemies have made me; for you are the same God that raised me up from the gates of death, so that I proclaimed all your glory at the gates of the city of Jerusalem.

Either Alfred misunderstood the Latin in the seventh line of the psalter, or he purposefully choose to leave out a reference to a sword, "Inimici defecerunt frameae," and substitute a less material form of persecution, "Seo redelse and þæt geþeaht urra feonda geteorode." And instead of literally rendering "in portis filiae Sion," Alfred chooses to make the reference more clear and provide the name of the city that would have been more familiar to his audience.

In Psalm 45, Alfred expands on his source text by more than doubling its word count in his translation. He apparently decided the figurative language of the Latin was not plain enough for his audience so instead he provides a vivid, violent scene.

- 4) Sonaverunt et turbatae sunt aquae eorum conturbati sunt  
montes in fortitudine eius
- 4) Their waters roared and were troubled: the mountains were  
troubled with his strength.
- 3) Ure fynd coman swa egeslice to us þæt us ðuhte for þam  
geþune þæt sio eorþe eall cwacode; and hy wæron, þeah, sona  
afærde fram Gode swyþor þonne we, and þa upahafenan  
kynincgas swa þær muntas wæron eac gedrefde for þæs Godes  
strenges.
- 3) Our enemies fell upon us so terribly that it seemed to us that all  
the earth quaked from the clamor; and nevertheless they were  
frightened by God more severely than we; and their kings, up-  
lifted like the mountains, were disturbed by God's might.

Gone are the "aquae" of the original verse, replaced by a more physically impressive display of God's wrath as the Christian deity wielded nature against the foes of his chosen people. And instead of the mountains trembling,

it is the pagan kings who quiver in fear. Clearly this was a verse meant to empower the Anglo-Saxons they faced the ravagings of Danes.

Another example is found in Psalm 21.10, where Alfred's addition is clearly made for the sake of his audience, to clear up potential misunderstandings. The Latin original reads "circumdederunt me uituli multi, tauri pinques obsederunt me" [Many calves have surrounded me: fat bulls have besieged me]. The paraphrast translates "Me ymbhringdon swiðe mænige calfru, þæt synt, lytle and niwe fynd, and þa fættan fearas me ofsæton, þæt synd, strengran fynd" [A great many calves surround me, that is, a little and new fiend; and the fatted farrows oppress me, that is, a stronger fiend]. The king apparently thought lay readers might not understand the significance of these animals in this passage so he dissects the idiom for them.

In the following examples, the paraphrast's non-literal translation choices and departures from his source are supported by the Introductions' hermeneutical stances. This correlation supports the argument for a single author being responsible for both the Psalms themselves and their introductory material. It also highlights the conviction Alfred has in his chosen guidelines, showing that he will knowingly reject word-for-word translation to enact his own interpretations. Comparison with other psalters, for example the Vespasian Psalter, reveals how idiosyncratic these choices are, as they pit Alfred's translations against more orthodox readings. Psalm 42.1 is an instance of this synchronicity between the Introduction and the psalm. The *Psalterium*

*Romanum* reads, “Iudica me Deus et discerne causam meam de gente non sancta ab homine iniquo,” [Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy: deliver me from the unjust man]. The paraphrast translates, “Dem me, Dryhten, and do sum toscead betwuh me and unrihtwisum folce, and from facenfullum menn and unrihtwisum gefriða” [Judge me, Lord, and do some distinguishing between me and unrighteous folk, and guard from deceitful and unjust men]. And in the Introduction, he expands on his interpretation somewhat: “Dauid sang þysne tu and feowertigopan sealm, and healsode God on þyssum sealmes þaet he demde betwuh him and his feondum þe nane æ Godes ne heoldon,” [David sang these two and forty psalms, and entreated God in this psalm that he judge between him and his foes, none of which hold law or God]. Now, compare with the translation from the Vespasian Psalter: “Doem mec god 7 toscad intingan mine of ðeode noht haligre from men unrehtum 7 facnum genere me” [Judge me God and distinguish my cause from that of the unholy nation; from unrighteous and deceitful men deliver me].

For Psalm 43.2, the Latin reads “opus quod operatus es in diebus eorum in diebus antiquis” [The work, you have wrought in their days, and in the days of old]. The paraphrast makes a small but telling change: “þa weorc þe þu worhtest on hiora dagum and on hiora foregengena dagum” [The work that you wrought in their days and in the days of their forebearers] Again, the Introduction provides the exegetical perspective: “Dauid...myngode þære gyfa

þe he his fædrum and his foregengum sealed, and hiora eaforum gehet”

[David...mentions the gifts that he, his fathers, and his forefathers supplied and promised their successors] All of the glossed Old English psalters, however, choose some variation of “(e)ald” to translate “antiquis.”<sup>66</sup>

The next example is Psalm 48.18, where the Latin has “Quoniam non cum morietur accipiet haec omnia” [For when he will die he shall take nothing away], Alfred translates “For þæm þe he ðyder ne læt þæt eall mid him, þonne he heonan færþ” [Therefore when he goes thither forth from here, he cannot take that inferior stuff with him]. In the Introduction, the pertinent *argumentum* explains “Dauid...lærde ealle men...þæt hy ongeaton þæt hi ne mihton þa welan mid him lædan heonan of weorulde” [David...teaches all men...so that they perceive that they might not then bring pollution with them hence from the world]. Alfred adds more details that, while not included in the original psalm, are clearly there to support readers. The Vespasian Psalter reads “For ðon nales ðonne he spilteð onfoð ðas all” [Therefore when he dies he will not take this all].

## G. Conclusion

In effect, Alfred’s prose rendering of the first fifty psalms reaches beyond the boundaries of orthodox biblical translation to provide his audience with a unique reading experience not normally available to the lay illiterate. The Introductions frame the translation by listing the hermeneutic logic of the

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<sup>66</sup> See Pulsiano, *Old English Glossed Psalters Psalms 1-50*, 617-18.

paraphrast's chosen *argumentum*, drawing out the passage of scripture's multiple levels of signification and presenting the different viewpoints as a simple, cohesive unit. This attention to didacticism and clarity extends throughout the paraphrases of the psalms themselves, and even here, in the midst of holy writ, Alfred departs from literal translation to insert more commentary, often taken from psalter tradition, but occasionally integrating opinions or word choices that have no discernable source beyond his own initiative. It is extremely rare for biblical translators to take liberties with their source, since doing so could earn one the fatal label of "heretic": it strikes me as even more of a risk for a king who has no formal scholarly training and no real ecclesiastical authority. This risk may not be that of hereticism, but the king's entire cultural and educational reform movement depends on appropriate translation of "those books most needful to know": if he had failed to render up a suitable version of the psalms, the most popular book of the Bible in this time, then his entire enterprise might have been for naught. Instead, the *Prose Psalms* should be acknowledged as the pinnacle of a great translator's many successes. Alfred created an all-in-one text that guided readers and offered scholarly insight as well as spiritual inspiration. In this translation, modern day readers can witness the enactment of *ruminatio*, meditative reading, or even a version of *lectio divina* for the layperson.

## Chapter 2: Æthelwold and Mastery of the Benedictine Rule

### A. Introduction

*Inclitus pastor populiue rector  
Cuius insignem colimus triumphum,  
Nunc Adelluoldus sine fine letus  
Regnat in astris.  
Qui pater noster fuit et magister  
Exhibens sacre documenta uite,  
Et Deo semper satagens placer  
Cordo benigno*

Æthelwold, the excellent shepherd and ruler of the people,  
whose glorious triumph we celebrate, now rules joyous in  
heaven without end. He was our father and teacher, showing  
us the pattern of the holy life, and always concerned to please  
God in his kindly heart.<sup>1</sup>

After treating King Alfred's translation enterprise, most specialist and generalist accounts of vernacular translation in England turn their attentions next to Ælfric of Eynsham, "one of the two best known figures in Anglo-Saxon translation."<sup>2</sup> We can see this pattern in the most-cited studies of translation during this time period: for example, Robert Stanton devotes a chapter each to Alfred and Ælfric, with no other English translator earning such recognition, and his research is often considered the most wide-ranging and foundational. However, in between the educational reforms of Wessex and the exegetical

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<sup>1</sup> Hymn, likely by Æthelwold's student Wulfstan, to celebrate Æthelwold's translation on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 996. Latin original and translation are in *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, edited and translated by Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), cxiii-cxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2002), 144.



achievements of Ælfric, there is another vernacular translator who has only started to garner appropriate interest in the past decade or so, despite his being the man Ælfric was proud to call his teacher – Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester.

Æthelwold has long been recognized as a leading figure in the Benedictine reform movement that saw ecclesiastical figures in England continuing – in spirit if not letter – the rebuilding of aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture initiated during Alfred’s reign. This does not mean that there was an unbroken bolstering of English literary, religious, and educational culture from the end of Alfred’s life to the beginning of the Benedictine revival, usually dated as 959, coinciding with Edgar’s coronation upon the death of his brother Eadwig. As Michael Drout states, “Very soon after Edgar’s accession, in 960, Dunstan was made archbishop of Canterbury and the Benedictine reform began in earnest.”<sup>3</sup> Alfred’s brother Edward the Elder spent nearly his entire time as king at war, with Vikings, his own cousin Æthelwold, and various remnants of other dynasties in England. He had little use for Alfred’s program of cultural refinement, but thankfully his son Æthelstan had more of his grandfather in him: Drout even makes the bold suggestion that Edward’s second son “was perhaps more deserving than his grandfather Alfred of the epithet ‘the Great’.”<sup>4</sup>

Edgar’s reign signaled a renewal of religious and educational aspirations, spearheaded by the efforts of the forceful leaders of the Benedictine monastic

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe, AZ: MRTS, 2006), 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

order, of which Æthelwold is the most important in terms of linguistic and translational developments in England. However, an analysis of both his Latin writings and his vernacular translations reveals that rather than the patristic fathers, the bishop of Winchester appealed instead to more native figures and traditions, primarily the historian Bede and the Anglo-Latin poet Aldhelm. From these two men in particular Æthelwold adopted a style of writing, in the prestige and the vernacular, that revolved around extreme lexical variation, interpretive additions, and even the outright erasure of original texts in favor of forwarding his own political and theological agendas. In Æthelwold's rendering of St. Benedict's *Rule*, patristic precedence takes a backseat to vernacular innovation, leading to some of the most fluent and fluid idiomatic translation in Old English's short history. And thereby illustrating Lawrence Venuti oversteps when he claims "fluency emerges in English-language translation during the early modern period, a feature of aristocratic literary culture in seventeenth-century England."<sup>5</sup> Æthelwold's translation of the Benedictine reform's key doctrines is a triumph for Old English and its practitioners, as well as an example of how a near-sacred text, almost as closely guarded as scripture itself, can be fairly rendered and yet manipulated at both the micro- and the macro-levels.

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 43.

## B. Æthelwold's Life & Context

Scholars are fortunate to have a plethora of contemporary or near-contemporary accounts of Æthelwold's life and times from numerous sources, including two short biographical lives by his most famous students, Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan Cantor.<sup>6</sup> Although these texts have been accepted as factual, they are undoubtedly selective since they were also written, in part, as support for the cult of Æthelwold that gathered a following after the translation of his remains in 996. Many of the primary events and achievements in the bishop of Winchester's life can be checked against other ecclesiastical or administrative texts however. Born in Winchester early in Edgar's reign, c. 900 CE, Æthelwold's family connections allowed him to fraternize with the royal court and eventually earn an appointment under Bishop Ælfheah of Winchester, who would ordain Dunstan and Æthelwold on the same day. These associations introduced Æthelwold to Benedictine monks from the continent, especially those from Fleury and Ghent. These practices – as well as their adherence to and adoration of patristic and Bedan doctrines – would be a catalyst for the monastic reform movement in England after Dunstan and Æthelwold took orders at the newly reformed Benedictine monastery of Glastonbury, a house that remained an epicenter of the Anglo-Saxon movement. Æthelwold was soon appointed abbot of the neglected Abingdon monastery. Using his newfound role of power, Æthelwold quickly

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<sup>6</sup> The Lapidge and Winterbottom volume contains the Latin version of Ælfric's text as well, in Appendix A, 70-80.

began making changes and educating a new generation of monks who would spread his version of Benedictine monasticism and increase the prestige of English spirituality.

Æthelwold's influence increased substantially when the king appointed him bishop of Winchester in 963. The reformer revealed his idiosyncratic vehemence when he immediately dismissed the clerks that were part of his staff and replaced them with monks, "a policy which ran counter to contemporary English and continental practices."<sup>7</sup> As popular as Æthelwold was with the royal family, even serving as Edgar's tutor for a period of time at Winchester, he was equally vilified by a vocal minority of laymen and secular landowners who complained about his aggressive dealings and who even managed to reverse some of the king's decisions after Edgar's death in 975. This opposition ran so deep there was even an attempt made on Æthelwold's life with poison, by a group of clerics deposed from the Old Minster, as reported by Wulfstan in his *Vita Sancti Æthelwold*.<sup>8</sup> In this as well, the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiast is following in his predecessor's path: Gregory the Great reports that Benedict was also almost killed by poisoned wine, prepared by monks who were strained by the new and uncharacteristically strict doctrines of the *Rule*.

Throughout his career, the bishop showed special interest in the liturgical practices of English religious institutes and it is evident that he sought inspiration

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Yorke, "Introduction" to *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>8</sup> *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, Chapter 19.

and instruction from the recent reformations on the Continent. He maintained lines of communication with European Benedictines and their influence is widespread, evident in everything from the lavish *Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, which synthesizes native and Continental traditions,<sup>9</sup> to customs in the *Regularis Concordia* that bear a strong resemblance to those in practice at Fleury around the same time.<sup>10</sup>

Æthelwold was certainly not alone in his efforts to rekindle monasticism and Latin literary culture in England – Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury (959-88) and Oswald, bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York (961-92; 972-92) in particular were actively pushing forward reforms of their own in the tenth-century, albeit in different ways. There is a long line of scholarly debate over which ecclesiastical figure looms the largest in the Benedictine movement and while this is not something that can accurately be measured, there is more documentary evidence supporting Æthelwold's role in the refounding of monasteries and his overall involvement in the political crossovers between the crown and the church. The most concentrated reform activity does not start until after Æthelwold is made bishop of Winchester. And, most importantly for the development of a literary culture and translation practices, "[w]e know that he

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold*, see Andrew Prescott's "The Text of the *Benedictional of St Æthelwold*" in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, 119-147.

<sup>10</sup> There has been some more work in recent years on the connections between Fleury and Abingdon especially. See Marco Mostert's "Relations between Fleury and England" in *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison*, ed. David Rollason, Conrad Leyser, and Hannah Williams (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 158-208; also, Jesse Billett, "Chapter 5: The Divine Office and the Tenth-Century English Benedictine Reform," *The Divine Office in Anglo-Saxon England, 597-c.1000* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2014).

believed in the English vernacular, at least for the benefit of the 'ignorant,' and that he did as much as anyone after Alfred to make Old English into a literary language."<sup>11</sup> The *Regularis Concordia* is the principal testament to Æthelwold's advancements.

The *Regularis Concordia Anglica nationis monachorum sanctimonialiumque* was the topic of a council that took place in Winchester sometime before Edgar's death, likely 970 – 973.<sup>12</sup> Here it was decreed that all English monastic houses would adhere to this new version of the Benedictine *Rule* and "[t]here is good reason to believe that Æthelwold was the main compiler."<sup>13</sup> There are three important Old English documents commonly attributed to Æthelwold: the tract known as "King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries," the New Minster foundation charter, and the *Rule of St. Benedict* included in the *Regularis Concordia*. The former text is extant in only one twelfth-century manuscript, BL Cotton Faustina A.x (148r-151v), right after a copy of Æthelwold's translation of *Rule of St. Benedict*. The New Minster Foundation charter, found in British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. viii, is unique among others of this well-populated genre of writing from Anglo-Saxon England and it has long been used as proof of Æthelwold's range of literary and technical

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Wormald, "Æthelwold and his Continental Counterparts: Contact, Comparison, Contrast" in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> See "The Proem to the *Regularis Concordia*" in *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church, Vol I: A.D. 871-1204*, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett, and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 135.

<sup>13</sup> Yorke, 4.

fluency;<sup>14</sup> besides the normal contents of such a document, the New Minster charter contains an extended injunction describing how monks should adhere to the doctrines of the *Rule* as well as some “possibly the earliest surviving example of rhyming Latin prose from Anglo-Saxon England.” These lines, serving as an invocation, read

Fruebatur letabundus creatoris tripudio. et angelorum alacriter  
utebatur consortio.

Non eum corporalis debilitabat inbecillitas. nec animi affligebat  
anxietas.

Non typo leuis raptabatur superbie. sed suo se coniungens auctori  
humilis pollebat mirifice.

Non eum inanis tumidum uexabat Gloria. sed deuotum creatoris  
magnificabat memoria (ch ii).<sup>15</sup>

These rhetorical flourishes exhibit the bishop’s extreme preference for the use of the “hermeneutic style” of writing popularized in England by Aldhelm. The vocabulary and meter of the lines also indicate the author had knowledge of Virgil and other Late Latin poets, particular Prudentius.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Æthelwold’s use of rhyming prose in Latin may have influenced the famous “rhythmical prose” cadences of his students, especially Ælfric.

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<sup>14</sup> See Lapidge, “Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher” in *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, 95-98.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>16</sup> Lapidge, “Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher,” 96.

### C. Æthelwold's Translation Impetus

Another detail that sets Æthelwold apart from his fellow Anglo-Saxon translators is the reason behind his rendering of the *Rule of St. Benedict* into the vernacular. Bede is reported to have chosen to translate the Book of John—having already completed impressive commentaries on the Books of Mark and Luke—and Isidore's *De natura rerum* out of a desire to amend or at least abridge the Spanish patriarch's work.<sup>17</sup> Alfred's inspiration stems in part from a desire to reclaim for his kingdom the legacy of the golden age of English knowledge that reached its peak during Bede's own time. The king also claims to have been witness to further decay of learning in his lifetime, especially the loss of language knowledge necessary for studying the Latin masters of the past. The bishop of Winchester, however, was explicitly required by King Edgar and Queen Ælfthryth to provide an Old English version of the *Rule* as part of their agreement to give him the estate of Sudbourne. This transaction is recorded in the *Liber Eliensis*, a historical chronicle of the Isle of Ely composed in Latin in the twelfth century at Ely Abbey in eastern Cambridgeshire.<sup>18</sup> I include the entirety of the relevant passage, from Book II, 37:

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<sup>17</sup> Cuthbert propounds this information in his famous letter on Bede's death, translated and included as an appendix in Judith McClure and Roger Collins' *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 300-303.

<sup>18</sup> Janet Fairweather's introduction to and translation of the *Liber Eliensis* is the best source for information on this important, oft-ignored document. See especially xiii-xxiii in *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth, compiled by a Monk of Ely in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2005).



Ædgarus rex et Alftreth dederunt S. Æthelwoldo manerium, quod dicitur Suthburn, et cyrographum quod pertinebat, quod comes qui dicebatur Scule dudum possederat; eo pacto, ut ill regulam S. Benedicti in Anglicum idioma de Latino transferret: qui sic fecit. Deinde vero B. Æthelwoldus dedit eandem terram S. Ætheldrythæ, cum cyrographo ejusdem terræ.<sup>19</sup>

King Edgar and {Queen} Ælfthryth gave St Æthelwold an estate called Sudbourne, together with the charter for the land, [which the earl who was called Scule had once held], on condition that he, Æthelwold, translate the *Rule of St. Benedict* from Latin into the English language. And he did so. But then the blessed Æthelwold gave the land in question, with the charter of this same land, to St Æthelthryth.<sup>20</sup>

Æthelwold's reform activity was especially concentrated in this fenland area of England and Sudbourne is but one of many estates or land tracts bequeathed to the bishop by his royal supporters. This particular case, however, is the only one in which the royal family include such a specific and literary requirement. This request is in keeping with Edgar's and Ælfthryth's overall interest in ecclesiastical matters, and given the swelling numbers of new monks and nuns being trained at Æthelwold's revived monasteries and nunneries, there was need for a vernacular

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<sup>19</sup> *Liber Eliensis: ad fidem codicum variorum, Volume 1*, by Thomas Richard of Ely, ed. D.J. Stewart (London: Impensis Societatis, 1848), 153.

<sup>20</sup> Fairweather, 134.

version of the reform movement's most important document. Edgar is emulating Alfred by taking an active, aggressive role in the literary and educational well-being of his kingdom but since the newer monarch lacks his ancestor's academic acumen, he relies on his former teacher and adviser.

#### **D. Æthelwold: the Prestige and the Vernacular**

Although Bede and Alfred imply varying levels of disappointment over the necessity to translate Latin texts in Old English, there is no such intimation in Æthelwold's writings. Instead, there seems to be a simple acceptance that this is a necessary task to be undertaken along with the numerous other projects that make up the vast and diverse reformation enterprise. Both Wulfstan and Ælfric underline their mentor's commitment to the vernacular and especially translation from Latin into Old English. Wulfstan's *Vita St Æthelwoldi* (c. 996) is the foremost source of current understandings of the curriculum the bishop initiated when put in charge of the Old and New Minsters, where scores of future ecclesiastical leaders were educated and instilled with reformation ideals.

Ælfric's *Vita*, once thought to have preceded Wulfstan's but now widely recognized as a condensed paraphrase of the other's more complete life, supports Wulfstan's comments on the place of the vernacular in their studies.<sup>21</sup> The Cantor of Winchester attests "dulce namque erat ei adolescents et iuuenes semper docere, et Latinos libros Anglice eis soluere, et regulas grammaticae artis ac metricae

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<sup>21</sup> Lapidge and Winterbottom settled this debate in *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, especially the "Introduction."

rationis tradere, et iocundis alloquiis ad meliora hortari” [It was always agreeable to him (i.e. Æthelwold) to teach young men and the more mature students, translating Latin texts into English for them, passing on the rules of grammar and metrics, and encouraging them to do better by cheerful words].<sup>22</sup> Wulfstan’s very next sentence is notable in how he links these pedagogical topics and methods to the inordinate success attained by Æthelwold’s students. He declares, “Vnde factum est ut perplures ex discipulis eius fierent sacerdotes atque abates et honorabiles episcopi, quidam etiam archiepiscopi, in gente Anglorum” [Accordingly, many of his pupils became priests, abbots, and notable bishops, some even archbishops, in England].<sup>23</sup> “Vnde” indicates a causal link, one which Ælfric maintains in his own discussion of his teacher’s program by using the exact same word. It might have helped that the bishop was “iocundus” and apparently did not resort to physical reprimands as often as other magisters. The point here is that Æthelwold valued the study of grammar, metrics, and the vernacular, and especially the use of translation from Latin into Old English. And he successfully passed these values onto an entire generation of church leaders and scholars, although Ælfric actively avoided certain aspects of his master’s style when translating, as I will discuss in my next and final chapter.

Overall, there exists equal evidence of Æthelwold’s alacrity in both the vernacular and the Latin: of the latter, we possess, first and foremost, the *Regularis*

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Chapter 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Chapter 31.

*concordia*, three charters (the New Minster Foundation Charter, charter S 687, and charter S 739), a letter to an unnamed foreign noble, and possibly a few prayers.<sup>24</sup> These and a few other proofs give every indication that the reformer was very comfortable using Latin, and that he unquestionably favored the “hermeneutic style” commonly associated with the seventh century writings of the Anglo-Latinist Aldhelm and others. Although the bishop was familiar with the writings of the Latin fathers, there is far more evidence of influence from figures in the more immediate past, particularly Christian Latin writers from the continent and the Anglo-Latin poets of England’s golden age of learning in the sixth and seventh centuries. Æthelwold was interested in a uniquely English style of writing and translation, not as a by-product of ignorance concerning Latin, but because he admired the vernacular. Wulfstan’s *Vita* observes,

Didicit namque inibi liberalem grammaticae artis peritiam atque mellifluam metricae rationis dulcedinem, et moe apis prudentissimae, quae sole boni odoris arbores circumuolando requirere et iocundi saporis holeribus incumbere, diuinorum carpebat flores uoluminum. Catholicos quoque et nominatos studiose legebat auctores.<sup>25</sup>

At Glastonbury he learned skill in the liberal art of grammar and the honey-sweet system of metrics; like a provident bee that habitually

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<sup>24</sup> For more on these short Latin documents, see Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge UP, 1999), 125-27.

<sup>25</sup> *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, Chapter 9.

flits around looking for scented trees and settling on greenery of pleasant taste, he laid toll on the flowers of religious verse. He was eager to read the best-known Christian writers.

It is impossible to know who these “best-known Christian writers” were for late tenth-century monks-in-training, but as Leslie Lockett points out, the influential authors “detected in Æthelwold’s known Latin writings are not [Boethius, Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome] but Venantius Fortunatus, Juvenius, and Aldhelm, as well as St. Benedict and Bede.”<sup>26</sup>

To her list I would also add Isidore of Seville, for not only does Æthelwold replace a chapter in the *Rule* with a section from an Isidorean text, but there are other evidences of the Anglo-Saxon bishop’s affiliation with the patriarch. Æthelwold apparently knew his *Etymologiae*, as, for example, a section in Chapter 70 of the *Rule* has been traced to this older work. The bishop of Winchester writes “Cildgeongum mannum eal geferræden unþeawas styre, and hyra mycele gymene hæbben oð þæt fifteope ger hyra ylde” [The entire community shall correct bad habits among ‘child young’ men, and shall be especially mindful of them until they have attained their fifteenth year of age].<sup>27</sup> The phrase “Cildgeongum mannum,” as well as the age limitation, is likely derived from Isidore’s comments on the ages of man: “Secunda aetas pueritia, id est pura et necdum ad

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<sup>26</sup> Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2011), 372.

<sup>27</sup> Brian O’Camb, “Bishop Æthelwold and the Shaping of the Old English Exeter Maxims,” in *English Studies* 90.3 (2009): 265.

generandum apta, tendens usque ad quartumdecimum annum" [The second age is childhood, that is, a pure age and not yet fit for procreating, lasting all the way through the fourteenth year]. More proof of Isidore's legacy is that Æthelwold's students also adopted their magister's fondness for him, and both Wulfstan and Ælfric rely on the archbishop in various tracts of their own.<sup>28</sup>

Lapidge – on whom Lockett bases her own comments – after considering Æthelwold's corpus and various book lists, summarizes his findings by declaring:

[W]e can be sure that Æthelwold knew the *Regula S. Benedicti* and the commentary by Smaragdus, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, Aldhelm's *De virginitate* (both prose and verse versions) and some Christian-Latin poets, notably Prudentius and Juvenius. ... Of patristic texts there is Julian of Toledo's *Prognosticum*, Augustine's *Contra Academicos* and the letters of Cyprian; .... Of biblical exegesis there is Bede's commentary on Mark, an unspecified commentary on the Song of Songs, and another on certain psalms. Where, one might ask, are Jerome's numerous biblical commentaries, Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* or *De trinitate*, Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmorum*, or Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, *Homiliae .xl. in euangelia* or *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, to name a few of the most widely studied patristic texts?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on Isidore's influence on Wulfstan and Ælfric, see *Finding the Right Words: Isidore's Synonyma in Anglo-Saxon England* by Claudia Di Sciacca (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2008), especially 50-54.

<sup>29</sup> "Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher," 103.

These findings underscore the surprising emphasis on Old English by Æthelwold in his own career and those of his students. Although it is assumed the bishop had acquired knowledge of the patristic fathers on his route to becoming a monk and then a church leader, the truth remains that figures like Bede and Aldhelm figure much more prominently.

Besides testaments from students, another way to determine that Æthelwold's school at Winchester included a substantial curriculum in Old English, along with the expected concentrations in Latin grammar and exegesis, is by a study of vocabulary in numerous vernacular glosses from this time period, referred to as "Winchester works."<sup>30</sup> The "inner group" of these texts include the enlarged *Regula canonicorum* of Chrodegang, the Royal Psalter, the interlinear gloss of the Lambeth Psalter, and the Old English interlinear gloss of the *Expositio hymnorum*. Comparisons of the word choices made in these documents with Old English writings by Æthelwold, various contemporaries, and his most famous students, Wulfstan and Ælfric, reveal that the instances of confluence are too great for coincidence.<sup>31</sup> "The most reasonable explanation of the lexical similarities is that all these anonymous translations are the product of one school, that the school

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<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed summary of these works, see Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 89-94.

<sup>31</sup> Interest in "Winchester vocabulary" has flagged in recent years but a few articles are the core of what research has been and is being conducted: Helmut Gneuss, "The Origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's School at Winchester," *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972): 63-83; Walter Hofstetter, "Winchester and the Standardization of Old English Vocabulary," *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 139-61; Mechthild Gretsch, "Winchester Vocabulary and Standard Old English: the Vernacular in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 83.1 (2001): 41-87.

was located at Winchester, and Æthelwold was its master,” argues Lapidge.<sup>32</sup> Thus, “Standard Old English” in the tenth and eleventh centuries owes its literary and ecclesiastical status largely to the skills and efforts of the bishop and the legacy instilled by him in his intellectual descendants. Translation, beyond the Old English *Rule of St. Benedict*, was a fundamental aspect of Æthelwold’s reform program, just as it was in Alfred’s enterprise a century earlier. But unlike the styles represented by the corpus of writings associated with King Alfred, the bishop of Winchester’s Latin and vernacular are noticeably divided between two poles of expression: at the one end, Æthelwold often exhibits a knowledge of archaic Latin and even Greek vocabulary and enjoys employing neologisms and complex syntax; at the other end, especially when translating Latin texts into Old English, Æthelwold prizes clarity of expression and interpretive asides that go out of their way – and deviate from the text of the source – to explain difficult new concepts for potential readers. For the first time in its history, Old English has a writer skilled enough to coalesce these conflicting styles and firmly establish the vernacular on a par with Latin.

#### **E. Æthelwold’s Preface**

Before examining the methods and usages employed by Æthelwold in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, I want to first present some salient points raised by what is considered his translation of the document’s preface, otherwise known as “King

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<sup>32</sup> Lapidge, “Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher,” 109.



Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries."<sup>33</sup> Along with detailing the king's involvements in the reform, Æthelwold also reveals in-depth knowledge of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* and shows affinity with the work of Gregory the Great. As Patrick Wormald explains, the bishop desires something that was near and dear to Alfred's goals, "a return to Bede's Golden Age," when monasticism was not yet polluted and Latin literary culture was at a high point.<sup>34</sup> Given the text's tone, full of praises for Edgar, particularly his support of the monastic revival, it is possible Æthelwold wrote the document after the monarch's death, when critics, still nursing wounds from what some deemed harsh and unfair deals forced on landowners by the king that allotted large tracts of land and resources to newly found religious houses.<sup>35</sup> The text begins acephalously but the absent material might be only a rubric. The *EEM* starts with a summary of God's creation of earth and man, eventually leading to England and its pagan inhabitants, which "þurh sanctum Gregorium, þæs Romanisces setles bisceop, fram þæm þystrum heora geleafaste wearþ genered" [by St. Gregory, the bishop of the Roman see, it (England) was saved from the darkness of their unbelief]. Æthelwold's account of the English mission instigated by Gregory and led by Augustine borrows from Bede's retelling in Book I.23-27 and 33, and Book II.1 of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, although it is not clear if the bishop was reading the Latin or Old English

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<sup>33</sup> Quotations from the original, as well as its translation, are taken from *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church, Vol I: A.D. 871-1204*, 142-154.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick Wormald, "Æthelwold and His Continental Counterparts," 40.

<sup>35</sup> Whitelock, 142-43.

version.<sup>36</sup> There is also a break in the text at folio 148, an omission of no less than one leaf and maybe even three. The missing material follows praise for the previous state of monasticism in England and the final word before the lacuna, which is the first in a cut-off sentence, is “Ac,” indicating that Æthelwold is likely about to extoll his interpretation of why religious institutions devolved in the centuries intervening between Augustine of Canterbury’s mission and the Benedictine reform. This section might also contain an anecdote about a young Edgar stumbling upon the ruins of a derelict monastery and swearing to restore such religious and intellectual places to their old glory – William of Malmesbury relates this tale and cites a prologue to the *Rule of St. Benedict* as his source, likely Æthelwold’s tract.<sup>37</sup>

However, Æthelwold, like Bede, sees fit here to manipulate the words of a patristic father, Gregory the Great in this case, when he claims

He georne þone his gespelian þurh ærendracan manode ond lærde  
 þæt he georne mynstra timbryda Criste to lofe ond weorþunge, ond  
 þæm Godes þeowum þone ylecan þeaw tæhte ond gesette þe þa  
 apostolas mid heor geferrædene on þam anginne ures Cristendomes  
 heoldon.

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<sup>36</sup> See Lapidge, “Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher,” 102; Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 43; Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 290-92.

<sup>37</sup> Wormald, “Æthelwold and His Continental Counterparts,” 40.

He [Gregory] eagerly admonished and instructed his deputy [i.e. Augustine] by messenger that he should eagerly found monasteries to the praise and honour of Christ, and should teach and establish for the servants of God the same mode of life which the apostles maintained with their society in the beginning of our Christianity.

Bede reports this interaction between Gregory and Augustine in *Historia ecclesiastica* at Book I.27, but there is no reference to monasteries in the Northumbrian scholar's record. Given what we know about Æthelwold's role in the monastic reform of his time, as well as his alignment with Gregory, it is not surprising that the bishop would want to insert support for the resurgence of the Benedictine order in the patristic father's original instructions for the spread of Christianity through England. After the break in the folios, Æthelwold continues to relate the role of King Edgar in supporting the church and monasticism and declares that before his reign "Ær þæm lyt m[u]neca wæs on feawum stowum on swa miclum rice þe be rihtum regule lifdon" [there were only a few monks in a few places in so large a kingdom who lived by the right rule]. The bishop does not fail to mention some of his own exploits, though he attaches them instead to the king, claiming, in one example, "Witodlice he adref [cano]nicas þe on þæm foresædum gyltum ofer[fle]de genihtsumedon" [he drove out canons who abounded beyond measure in the aforesaid sins]. Æthelwold also includes Edgar's second wife in this preface, applauding Queen Ælfthryth for her active interest in the reform and especially her support of nunneries: "An sumum stowun eacswicle

he mynecæna gestapolode and þa Æ[l]fþryþe his gebedden betehte þæt heo æt ælcere neode hyra gehulpe" [In some places also he established nuns and entrusted them to his consort, Ælfthryth, that she might help them in every necessity].

When Æthelwold finally turns to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, he is careful to explain that the king had a personal interest in the consuetudinary: "He began mid geornfulre scrudnunge smeagan ond ahsian be þam gebodum þæs halgan regules, ond witan wolde þas sylfan regules lare" [With earnest scrutiny he began to investigate and inquire about the precepts of the holy rule, and wished to know the teaching of that same rule]. Scholars have no reason to doubt the bishop's testimony on this part, as many of the most famous kings in Europe, including Charlemagne and Alfred, had expressed interest in similar documents and doctrines in their own times. And Edgar's approval and support for Æthelwold's programs was consistent and ardent up to the monarch's final days. After elaborating on the king's reformation participation, *EEM* converges with the *Liber Eliensis* and expands on the historical chronicle's recording of the royal command for the translation of the *Rule*. Æthelwold explains that "He [Edgar] wolde eacswylce þurh þone regul oncnawen þa wislican gefadunge þe snotorlice geset is be incuþra ðinga endebyrdnesse. Þurh þises wisdoms lust he het þisne regul of læden gereorde on englisc geþeodan" [He wished also to know from the rule the wise disposition which is prudently appointed concerning the ordering of unfamiliar matters. Out of a wish for this knowledge he commanded this rule to

be translated from the Latin speech into the English language]. Unlike his grandfather Alfred, Edgar apparently lacked the skill or initiative to undertake a translation task himself, so instead he appoints one of England's most fervent religious leaders who also happened to have been a teacher and advisor to the royal family for many years. Æthelwold's details about the king's reasoning for ordering a translation of the *Rule* cannot be corroborated with any other documentation, but his explanations affirm what is already known about Edgar.

The bishop writes in *EEM*, "...scearpþanclan witan þe þone twyðæledan wisdom hlutorlice tocnawaþ – þæt is andweardra þinga ond gastlicre wisdom – ond þara ægþer eft on þrim todalum gelyfedlice wunaþ – þisse engliscan geþeodness ne behofien..." [...keen-witted scholars who understand clearly the two-fold wisdom – that is, the wisdom of things actual and spiritual – and each of those again admittedly consists of three divisions – do not require this English translation...]. Æthelwold's particular audience resembles the same readership later identified and expanded upon by his student Ælfric, when, in the latter's preface to Genesis, he mentions the risk that "gif sum dysig man þas boc ræt oððe rædan g[e]hyrþ, þæt he wille wenan, þæt he mote lybban nu on þære niw[an] æ, swa swa þa ealdan fæderas leofodon þa on þære tide ær þan þe seo ealde æ gesett wære, oþþe swa swa men leofodon under Moyses æ" [if some foolish man reads this book or hears it read, that person might wish to believe that one might live now under the new law, just as the old fathers lived, when in the time before the

old law was established, or just as people lived under the law of Moses].<sup>38</sup> Ælfric includes an anecdote about a “certain priest” who commits this sin of misinterpretation – Æthelwold is identifying a similar strand of ecclesiasts who lack appropriate knowledge to function as teachers. This is consonant with other actions the bishop had already taken, including the casting out of clerks from the minsters to be replaced by monks.

But he also has a wider audience in mind, as he explains in the next passage when he states

...is þeah niedbehefe ungelæredum woroldmonnum þe for helle wites ogan ond for Cristes lufan þis earmfulle lif forlætað ond to hyra Drihtne gecyrraþ ond þone halgan þeowdom þises regules geceosaþ; þy læs þe ænig [u]ngecyrrred woroldman mid nytnesse ond unge ... witte regules geboda abraece ond þære tale bruce þ[æt] he þy dæge misfenge þy he hit selre nyste.

...it is nevertheless necessary for unlearned laymen who for fear of hell-torment and for love of Christ abandon this wretched life and turn to their Lord and choose the holy service of this rule; lest any unconverted layman should in ignorance and stupidity break the precepts of the rule and employ the excuse that he erred on that day because he knew no better.

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<sup>38</sup> The Old English edition is in *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts 9, 1996), 116–19.

Æthelwold presents his translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict* as being for the benefit of new initiates into the revamped monastic houses supported by the king and queen and placed under the care of the reform leader. The bishop is keen to obtain the levels of spiritual faith and scholarly excellence that had once been the linchpin for the Northumbrian renaissance in northern England before and during Bede's day. For this to happen, the Benedictine order's most important text must be presented to new monks in a mode that they can fully understand. While Bede called for increase in the use of the vernacular in his letter to Cuthbert in order to increase the devoutness of the laity and fulfill some of the Church's pastoral duties, Æthelwold is focused on a narrower audience, but one whose knowledge of Latin was also deemed insufficient.

However, mimicking the teachings of the patristic fathers and their Anglo-Latin descendants, the bishop does not see a difference in the use of the prestige or Old English for matters of faith. Here is the key passage:

Ic þ[onne] geþeode to micclan gesceade telede. Wel mæg dug[an hit naht] mid hwylcan gereorde mon sy gestryned ond to þan soþan geleafan gewæmed, butan þæt an sy þæt he Gode gegange. Hæbben forþi þa ungelæreden inlendisce þæs halgan regules cyppe þurh agenes gereordes anwrigenesse, þæt hy þe geornlicor Gode þeowien and nane tale næbben þæt hy þurh nytennesse misfon þurfen.

I therefore consider translation a very sensible thing. It certainly cannot matter by what language a man is acquired and drawn to the

true faith, as long only as he comes to God. Therefore let the unlearned natives have the knowledge of this holy rule by the exposition of their own language, that they may the more zealously serve God and have no excuse that they were driven by ignorance to err.

Thus, Æthelwold has supplied readers with two primary reasons for translating the *Rule of St. Benedict*: (1) to fulfill the king's desire for a better understanding of the monastic doctrines and (2) to provide a vernacular version for "ungelæreden inlendisce" who will be the first generation of monks and nuns educated during the Benedictine reform. The bishop implies that even the laity should live by the standards and instructions of the *Rule*, a signal of his commitment to his order and his zeal for reform activities that extend beyond the walls of monasteries and nunneries.

It is possible to formulate some basic assumptions about the bishop's translation methods based on these two audiences, separated by rank but joined by an apparent lack of Latin mastery. Although the expectation is that a religious translator of such an important document will place fidelity to the source above any theological or political motivations, scholars do not even have to examine the *Regularis Concordia* itself to get a preview of Æthelwold's attitude in this regard. In the next section of the *EEM*, he observes, "Forþi, þonne, ic mid ealre estfulnessse mine æftergengan bidde ond þurh Drihtnes naman halsige, þæt hy þyses halgan regules bigenc a þurh Cristes gife geycen, ond godiende to fulfremedum ende



gebrençgen" [Therefore, then, I pray my successors with all devotion and implore in the Lord's name, that they ever increase the observance of this holy rule through the grace of Christ and may, through observance, bring themselves to a more perfect end]. Already, he is condoning making changes to and manipulations of the *Rule*. Æthelwold has proven himself willing to break from tradition in order to push through aspects of his reform that he feels will get English Benedictines closer to a return of the monastic rigor and devotion that characterizes the age of Bede. In the translation of the *Rule*, he has his chance to leave a lasting imprint of his desires and he authorizes his "successors" to preserve his legacy. As I will illustrate in my next section, many of Æthelwold's changes to the original doctrines of the *Rule* can be explained as the result of domestication required to make the text more accessible to his undereducated target audience. However, there are several instances where the bishop's variations away from Benedict's original can only be understood as purposeful deviation for the sake of Æthelwold's own agenda.

There is one final aspect of the *EEM* that deserves attention before returning to the *Regularis Concordia*. In the final paragraph of the preface, Æthelwold addresses "Abbodissum," or "abbesses," a clue that indicates this document was originally attached to a copy of the *Rule of St. Benedict* meant for one of the nunneries established by Æthelwold with the support of Queen Ælfthryth. There are several instances of feminine pronoun changes in one extant copy of the *Rule* in particular, Cotton Faustina A. x, but this is an exceptional

translation for many other reasons. These pronouns, as well as some feminine adjectives, were once at the center of an academic debate that placed a translation of the *Rule* for women as the source of a large number of subsequent revisions intended for male audiences. This viewpoint was espoused by German antiquarian Arnold Schröer, whose thesis is best presented, and neutralized, by Gretsich:

Æthelwold originally translated the [*Rule of St. Benedict*] for monks (text X). X was then rewritten to allow it to be used in nunneries: in this revision personal pronouns were changed, words like 'abbot' and 'brother' were replaced by 'abbess' and 'sister,' and chapter I. 60 [in part] and 62 were exchanged. The resulting version for nuns (Y) was, in turn, the starting point for a further revision of the text which was designated for monks (Z). From this version Z all the Old English manuscripts extant derive. Schröer was unable to produce proof for X, but he claimed that all Old English manuscripts may definitely be traced back via Z to Y because of the existence of remnants of feminine pronouns and adjective forms in all the manuscripts of the English translation. ... Schröer's thesis that *all* the

Old English manuscripts contain version Y in their stemma cannot, however, be upheld...<sup>39</sup>

So even though version Y is most likely not the source for all remaining translations of the *Rule*, the preface was originally attached to a copy meant for a nunnery and bears proof of Æthelwold's attention to individual readerships. I say "proof," for although scholars cannot show that all of these changes were made by the bishop, it is the consensus of both Gretsch and Lapidge that Æthelwold is the instigator and executor for these translation choices. And his willingness to alter systematically the gender of thousands of words signals both his unequaled knowledge of the source and his commitment to his own reformation and translation methods. No other Old English translator attempted such a wholistic, word-by-word amendment of an original, making the bishop's success all the more striking.

#### **F. The Latin Style of the *Regula S. Benedicti***

While a simple listing of its contents might misconstrue the *Rule* as simply a handbook or another religious consuetudinary, the reality is that Benedict's document is one of the most influential religious texts in the Middle Ages and any attempt to translate it must first be appreciated as a monumental undertaking fraught with theological, philosophical, linguistic, economic, and political risks. The majority of *regula* are straightforward reads and are given over to what can

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<sup>39</sup> Gretsch, "The Benedictine Rule in Old English: a Document of Æthelwold's Reform Politics," *Words, Texts, and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 142.

only be described as legalistic expression: St. Benedict's *Rule*, though not nearly as philosophical as, say, Augustine's *Soliloquia*, is imprinted by its writer's personal opinions and spiritual thoughts. So, if one were to embark on reading the *Rule* only for its "instructions," there is enough in the way of details to get bogged down and overlook its more subtle aspects. And if one were primarily interested in reading the *Rule* to obtain instead an understanding of the author's views on various religious doctrines or theological debates, Æthelwold's word- and clause-level changes can get ignored or undervalued.

Æthelwold's vernacular translation of the *Rule* is a construct of not only Benedict's instructions and musings but impressed on top of and in between those chthonic passages are remarks and interpretations of the bishop of Winchester. Sometimes the saint's and the latter-day reformer's thoughts collude, in spirit if not in letter, as, for example, in the case of their mutual concern for nuns and women in the church; in other places, such as their attitudes towards the divine service, which is obviously of great import for monks, Æthelwold and Benedict leave distinctly different impressions of their thoughts. The *Rule* had defined the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastic's life for decades before he was given the opportunity to translate it. Unlike the obstacles placed before Alfred and his circle of helpers when it was decided to translate, among other possibilities, Boethius' *Consolatio* and Augustine's *Soliloquia*, two very dense and very philosophical treatises that must have seemed alien to many readers, the *Rule of St. Benedict* was part of a living tradition of monasticism.

Before Æthelwold's time, scholars and theologians commented on, glossed over, and translated the *Rule* multiple times on a couple continents over several centuries. Even Benedict of Nursia's version is itself an adaptation of an earlier set of monastic guidelines known as the *Rule of the Master*, included by Benedict of Aniane, St. Benedict's namesake, in the *Concordia Regularum*. Under orders from Emperor Charlemagne, Benedict of Aniane incorporated all available copies of the Benedictine doctrines into into a single document. There are so many similarities between the *Rule of the Master* and the *Rule of St. Benedict* that twentieth century research has opposed the earlier consensus that the latter preceded the former, chronologically: "it looks...as if St. Benedict is the middle term between the RM (Master's Rule), which represents an earlier stage of development, and St. Gregory, whom we know to be later than the RM and the RB (Benedict's Rule)."<sup>40</sup> Æthelwold's translation falls at the end of this sequence of adjustments and re-renderings. It is unlikely that the English church leader had any knowledge of the *Rule of the Master* but that does not diminish the fact that St. Benedict did not create his doctrines out of nothing. His achievement was to transform the massive and prosaic *Master's Rule* into a personal statement of belief as well as a monastic guide, reducing the original to one-third of its size. Benedict was simply following standard literary protocols, which demanded creative reliance on authority instead of sustained originality. Æthelwold deserves equal praise for translating

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<sup>40</sup> RB 1980: *The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN, 1981), 81.

the *Rule* into a document firmly entrenched in the context of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform, thereby reflecting the concerns – both realized and potential – of its unique vernacular audience. To arrive at such a deep level of understanding and critical acuity with his source text, the bishop of Winchester would have needed a familiarity beyond the ken of that usually obtained by translators. *Lectio divina* would have augmented Æthelwold's already impressive grasp of grammar, vocabulary, and rhetoric, and as such it should be considered part of the foundation for his translation practice and theory.

### **G. Lectio Divina**

In order to arrive at a better understanding of Æthelwold's translation process, we must begin with a basic precept of monastic life that formalized the connected natures of reading, interpretation, and prayer – *lectio divina*. The daily act of *lectio divina* is one aspect of the monk's religious devotion that gave him the required expertise for ferreting out the spiritual sense of a text. This practice of literary meditation

reinforced the medieval habit of understanding salvation history as continuing into one's own time, place, and people. But in the monastery, the individual struggle for spiritual growth in a community setting raised its own questions concerning the biblical text. To answer these, exegetes began to give an increasingly strong emphasis to the moral level of interpretation and to apply the text to the spirituality expected of the monk. We see this most clearly in

Gregory the Great, and after him it became a major theme of all medieval exegesis.<sup>41</sup>

The phrase comes from Chapter 48 of the *Rule of St. Benedict*: “Otiositas inimica est animae, et ideo certis temporibus occupari debent fratres in labore manuum, certis iterum horis in lectione divina” [Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore the sisters should be occupied at certain times in manual labor, and again at fixed hours in sacred reading].<sup>42</sup> As part of his monastic discipline, Æthelwold would have been required not just to read the *Rule* but to memorize it. Gretsch elaborates on this practice, undertaken during the twelve-month period required of a novitiate before monastic vows could be taken:

During that time (again according to the *Regula*) a careful study of St Benedict’s text was to be the novice’s chief occupation. The decrees of the Aachen synods elaborate on this stipulation: they not only demand that the *Regula* be discussed word for word (‘singula uerba discutientes’); they require that the entire text be committed to memory where possible (‘ut monachi omnes qui possunt memoriter regulam discant’).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, *A History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol 2: the Medieval through the Reformation Periods* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 91-92.

<sup>42</sup> Unless noted otherwise, quotations from the Latin and English versions of the *Rule* are taken from *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, edited and translated by Timothy Fry. References to the Old English version are quoted from *Die Angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen Der Benediktinerregel*, edited and translated by Arnold Schröer (Darmstadt: Druck und Einband, 1964). Translations of the Old English, except where indicated, are my own.

<sup>43</sup> Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 252.

Although Æthelwold relied on outside sources when translating the *Rule*, he was not as dependent on these ancillaries as King Alfred.

One of the bishop's most-consulted sources is the *Expositio in Regulam S. Benedicti*, written by Smaragdus, abbot of Saint-Mihiel circa 820, but his usage does not borrow or mimic the style of a glossary. The same cannot be said of Alfred's style, which is often overly literal, even to the point of resembling an inter-linear gloss itself, moving from word to word in a clumsy emulation of more traditional translation. Alfred's attempt to make available for his audience those books he deemed most needful to know clearly took the king out of his comfort zone and readers witness, especially in passages from the *Soliloquia*, the king's attempts to grasp and adequately express the foreign logic and allusions that form the texture of Augustine's original text. For example, in Book 2 of his translation, Alfred removes all references to Platonic metaphysics and the Theory of Ideal Forms, especially those related to the topic of incorporeality, even though this epistemological argument "is indispensable to the logical demonstrations of the Latin *Soliloquia*."<sup>44</sup> The king's stated intent for his translation program is to open access to important knowledge, but apparently some doctrines and philosophies are avoided more out of ignorance and foreignness than anything else. Despite his laudable dedication to personal and "national" education in Latin texts and thought, Alfred simply cannot obtain the level of mastery that Æthelwold has over his sources. Intentions and methodologies aside, *lectio divina* is one literary and

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<sup>44</sup> Lockett, 335.



spiritual habit that separates Æthelwold's more polished translation style from King Alfred's earlier skills.

*Lectio divina* is the foundation of a Benedictine monk's daily routine and spiritual acumen, or, as Jean Leclercq characterizes it, "There is no Benedictine life without literature."<sup>45</sup> He explains that "the Rule of St. Benedict supposes learned monks...The fundamental fact that stands out in this domain is that one of the principal occupations of the monk is the *lectio divina*, which includes meditation: *meditari aut legere*."<sup>46</sup> On regular days, Æthelwold would have been allotted at least three hours for performing his devotional acts of reading, ruminating, and interpreting: on Sundays and during Lent, monks were encouraged to spend even more time alone for *lectio divina*.

In the Old English *Rule of St. Benedict*, Æthelwold, who has spent many hours of study and years of monastic living immersed in the Word-made-reality of Benedict's doctrines, can therefore better modulate the tone and connotations of his translation so as to stay faithful to his source while also inserting his own transformations and adaptations. Walter Benjamin, and other Romantic translation theorists, might still argue the bishop is in fact not a loyal translator because, according to him, "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though

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<sup>45</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham UP, 1982), 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.”<sup>47</sup> The bishop, like almost all early medieval translators, viewed translation more as collaboration, a chance to transmit the authority of the past while adding something new and original. There is a reverence for language and content, but this is not a philosophical hands-off type of reverence; instead, Æthelwold’s religious and scholarly values dictate that he manipulate his source in order to make it fit with his goals and audience.

Like Alfred, Æthelwold domesticates by bringing the text to the reader, instead of forcing the reader to leap across an aporia of understanding; and like the king, Æthelwold employs exegetical passages meant to eliminate any remaining gaps. But Æthelwold’s prose style is undeniably smoother and more idiomatic than Alfred’s, and while one could argue this is because the bishop was in every way better educated and lettered, I think the true answer lies in familiarity. Alfred was attempting to make the foreign familiar for himself *and* others, but Æthelwold was already a master of his source and could use that mastery to guide readers. It is curious, therefore, that he would employ the notoriously erudite “hermeneutic style” when translating for an audience who, by and large, lacked the requisite skills for interpreting new doctrines in a foreign register.

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin, 79.

## H. Hermeneutic Style in Latin & Translation

Lapidge's definition of "hermeneutic style" has become the accepted one by scholars since his groundbreaking essay on the topic:

By 'hermeneutic' I understand a style whose most striking feature is the ostentatious parade of unusual, often very arcane and apparently very learned vocabulary. In Latin literature of the medieval period, this vocabulary is of three general sorts: (1) archaisms, words which were not in use in classical Latin but were exhumed by medieval authors from the grammarians or from Terence and Plautus; (2) neologisms, or coinages; (3) loan-words. In the early medieval period the most common source of loan-words was Greek.<sup>48</sup>

One prominent feature of Æthelwold's translation practice that separates him from all other vernacular translators in England prior to the tenth century is his blending of this Anglo-Latin tradition of hermeneutic style with otherwise lucid, idiomatically sound Old English. Gretsche, building off of Lapidge, emphasizes this point as well, reasoning that "Bishop Æthelwold was one of the most ardent adherents of the hermeneutic style in Latin, and the influence of Aldhelm is pervasive in his own Latin writings."<sup>49</sup> This influence is pervasive in his vernacular translation as well. It is no coincidence that scholars see the rise of what is termed Standard Old English in the lifetime of Æthelwold, a phenomenon that aligns with the appearance of "Winchester vocabulary" and widespread use of hermeneutic stylistics.

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<sup>48</sup> "The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature," in *Anglo-Latin Literature, 900-1066: Volume I* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1993), 105.

<sup>49</sup> Gretsche, *Intellectual Foundations*, 125.

Bede, although he left behind no translations, has been praised for his clear, simple writing style ever since his own lifetime, and the Northumbrian scholar's treatises are often contrasted with the carefully wrought, neologically rich texts penned by Aldhelm in the same century. Æthelwold combines the historian's elegant clarity with the Latin writer's rich rhetoric. King Alfred borrowed from the wordhoard open to Old English poetic writings but nothing about his prose style is "hermeneutic" – the Wessex monarch grappled with the same monumental task of finding appropriate words and phrases in the vernacular that can carry similar philosophical, and philological, weight as the Latin originals but his preferred practices are the use of – often alliterative – doublets of Old English words for singular Latin terms and another expansionist method of inserting interpretive asides or exegetical comments to explicate particularly difficult of foreign passages. Æthelwold adopts similar habits but he advances the capacity of the vernacular to account for numerous levels of meaning even further through his affinity for ostentatious, archaic, and otherwise obscure word-level substitutions.

Later, even Æthelwold's most prolific student, Ælfric, disparaged his teacher's hermeneutic penchants and actively reasoned against them. He rejects outright archaic or otherwise complex vocabulary and structures in his preface to the Second Series of *Sermones catholici*:

...festinauimus hunc sequentem librum sicut omnipotentis Dei  
gratia nobis dictauit interpretare, non garrula uerbositate aut ignotis  
sermonibus, sed puris et apertis uerbis linguae huius gentis,

cupientes plus prodeſſ auditoribus ſimplici locutione quam laudari artificioſi ſermonis compositione — quam nequaquam didicit noſtra ſimplicitas.

...we have haſtened to translate the following book juſt as the grace of Almighty God dictated it to us, not with garrulous verboſity nor in unfamiliar diction but in the clear and unambiguous words of this people's language, deſiring rather to profit the liſteners through ſtraightforward expreſſion than to be praiſed for the compoſition of an artificial ſtyle, which our ſimplicity has by no means maſtered.<sup>50</sup>

This preference for a humble lexicon and moдеſt diction ſhould not be interpreted as a mark of inferior language or writing ſkills on Ælfric's part. Æthelwold was his teacher for many years and the biſhop was particularly vigorous in aſſerting his idea of a correct curriculum for monks and clerics, ſo there is every reaſon to aſſume Ælfric was amply expoſed to examples of the hermeneutic ſtyle. His own bilingual "Gloſſary" contains multiple references to Greek words and derivatives, along with other exotic vocabulary, but he is careful to include vernacular equivalents for all of theſe words, underſcoring his commitment to repudiating *obſcura verba*. In the preface, Ælfric puts the needs of readers before any rhetorical amplification or embellishment that, according to him, would only be a ſelf-ſerving diſplay at the expenſe of at leaſt his audience and poſſibly the ſignifications of the ſource text. This is not the only time the former ſtudent takes

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<sup>50</sup> The Latin and Old Engliſh are quoted from Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 111 and 128.

his old *magister* to task, nor is it the only example scholars have of Ælfric aligning himself with the *sermo humilis* writing style applauded by patristic figures, especially Augustine and Gregory the Great.

For Æthelwold, however, the influences of Bede and Aldhelm, expressed in the form of thousands of glosses on the latter's *De virginitate*, and the enlarged presence of continental traditions in the tenth century Benedictine reform seem to have outweighed the usually sacrosanct status of the Doctors of the Church, at least in the arena of prose style. The bishop of Winchester, to the best of my knowledge, has never been defended as a champion of that humble style, *sermo humilis*, and yet his translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict* is consistently admired in part for its approachability and readability, qualities not associated with other Anglo-Saxon hermeneutic practitioners.

## **I. Some Translation Basics**

"King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries" presents a snapshot of Æthelwold's prose style in Old English. The more overtly ornamental style of writing favored by the bishop for the vernacular preface suggests he had a slightly different audience in mind than for his translation of the *Rule* itself but there are still significant similarities, especially increased proliferation of more noticeable *recherché* vocabulary. These shared traits comprise some of the most basic tools available to Anglo-Saxon translators and the bishop makes use of them often. Like the *Rule*, the prologue contains examples of doublets: *lofe and weorþunge* "praise and honor," *manode and lærde* "admonished and instructed," *tæhte and gesette*

“taught and established,” *an heorte and an saul*, “one heart and one soul.”

Paronomasiatic word-play is present as well, primarily expressed by *figurae etymologicae*: *gewita--wat--wiste* “wise man--he knows--he knew,” *towearde--toward*, “approaching--towards,” *fremful--fremfullice* “beneficial,” *rihtwisa--rihtlice* “righteous--rightly,” *leangyfa--to leanes* “rewarder--as a recompense,” *fripast and fyrþrast* “protect and advance.” Readers also find the familiar feature of alliteration: *pyses lænan lifes* “of this transitory life,” *mid gastlicum gode* “with spiritual benefits,” *to his cynedome gecoren* “elected to his kingdom,” *mærlic mynster* “glorious minster,” *welm awlacige* “the zeal may become lukewarm.” And, further proof of the bishop’s proclivity for word usage similar to the style favored by Aldhelm and Byrhtferth, the prologue contains several rarely attested words: *earfoðwylde*, “hard to subdue,” *leangyfa* “rewarder,” *scearpþancol* “quick-witted,” *earmful* “wretched,” *inhold* “loyal at heart.”<sup>51</sup> The Dictionary of Old English Corpus searching reveals that *earfoðwylde*, *leangyfa*, *scearpþancol*, and *inhold* appear only in the *EEM*; *earmful* is used in three other minor texts. In the body of Æthelwold’s translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, all of these aspects of his prose style are amplified as he adds his own rhetorical flourishes to that of the existing Latin. Antoine Berman refers to this style of translation as “ennoblement,” and pejoratively describes it as “rewriting, a ‘stylistic exercise’ based on—and at the expense of—the original.”<sup>52</sup> In the history of translation, however, it is far more

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<sup>51</sup> Gretsche, *Intellectual Foundations*, 124.

<sup>52</sup> “Translation and Trials of the Foreign,” 247.

common to see ennoblement at work when translating a vernacular into the prestige because often the assumption is that the tongue of the common people needs to be uplifted by integrating, even if awkwardly, features and structures of the prestige. Æthelwold uses a method that showcases Old English's rhetorical and lexical capacity at the expense of the Latin's own diction and word-choice. Berman argues the resulting change is always a bad one that distorts the intentions of the foreign text, but in the case of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, Æthelwold clearly believes he has the appropriate knowledge and skill to justify his translation practice, without ever offering up a defense of his changes.

Doublets were a key feature of Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry before and after Æthelwold: Robert Stanton points out doublets, or, as they are sometimes called, contrastive word pairs, are very common in Alfred's translations and that the king was likely exposed to this type of lexical variation in numerous glosses.<sup>53</sup> Despite the ostensibly repetitive and inefficient method of rendering a single Latin word with two Old English terms, this amplification is not simply the result of some paucity or deficiency on the part of the vernacular, as was the mainstream assessment of scholars early in the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> In classical rhetoric, for example, Cicero applauded the use of *pluribus verbis* for both rhetorical effect and

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<sup>53</sup> Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, 98 and 128.

<sup>54</sup> See OE. P. Fijn van Draat's article "The Authorship of the Old English Bede" in *Anglia* 39 (1916): 319-46, especially at 322; Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, 58; Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King's English: Strategies of Translation in the Old English Boethius* (Albany: SUNY UP, 2005), 171.



periphrastic explanation.<sup>55</sup> While the use of doublets, especially in the vernacular's earliest stages, may indicate some anxiety over the adequacy of English to express the richness of Latin, the appositive style, another well-known feature of Old English writing, hinges on variety, or *differentia*, at the level of the word and sentence structure, and thus doublets fit into this scheme very well. Gretsich does not fail to note the importance of doublets for the bishop's translation method and she concludes that

...doublets do not result from a failure to produce an adequate single equivalent in Old English: their occurrence must rather be attributed to stylistic reasons, sometimes also to purposes of clarification. Thus doublets are employed to express different semantic components of a lemma, to couple a literal and a metaphorical translation of a lemma, for a display of English synonyms and so on; not infrequently they are joined by alliteration.<sup>56</sup>

The contrastive pair can be synonymous or non-synonymous, although Æthelwold's preference for hermeneutic styling often leads him to choose non-synonymous terms.

Isidore and Bede provide the reformer with inspiration since both call for lexical variation and *differentia*, specifically in the former's *Synonyma* and *Differentiae* and the latter's *De orthographia*. The *Synonyma de lamentation animae peccatricis* and *Libri differentiarum* were both circulating in England at this time and

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<sup>55</sup> Renner, Frederick M., *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi B.V., 1989), 108.

<sup>56</sup> *Intellectual Foundations*, 113.

they are some of the books that Æthelwold donated to Peterborough.<sup>57</sup> Like most of Isidore's writings, these books are filled with etymological and philological examples, definitions, and advice – particularly about “the accumulation of synonymous words and phrases” – that fit Æthelwold's prose and translation styles.<sup>58</sup> Aldhelm also knew the *Synonyma*, evidenced in part by his own love of *differentiae* and the fact that Isidore's text is the source for at least two Vercelli Homilies.<sup>59</sup> Bede's *De orthographia* gives, in alphabetical order, a long list of synonyms and near-homonyms, as well as definitions for features of grammar that could be used much like a modern reference book. Here the bishop of Winchester could find handy citations on *differentiae*, *paronomasia*, *figurae etymologicae*, and other grammatical or rhetorical terms that exhibit an influence on his style.

Doublets start to appear in the very first chapter of the *Rule*, where readers find Æthelwold has translated *servientes* (RSB 1.11) with *unalyfedlice fyliað and hyrsumiað*, “unlawfully follow and obey” (BR 9.24-10.1). In Chapter 2, Æthelwold renders *utilitas minus* (RSB 2.7) with *lytele note and nytwyrðnesse*, “little profit and usefulness” (BR 11.2), adding alliteration as well. A few paragraphs later, Benedict's *regere* (RSB 2.31) gets amplified by *rædan and racian*, “to guide and to govern” (BR 14.6). In the next chapter, Benedict writes *disponere* (RSB 3.6) and again the bishop alliterates when he translates *gestyhtige and gesette*, “to arrange

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<sup>57</sup> See Lapidge, “Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England,” *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 53-55.

<sup>58</sup> Gretschi, *Intellectual Foundations*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> For more on Aldhelm and Isidore, read Michael Winterbottom's “Aldhelm's Prose Style and its Origins,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 6 (1977): 39-76, especially 59-62.

and to set" (BR 15.18). In Chapter 28, there is an example of Æthelwold adding a moralizing tone with his use of a contrastive pair in place of a single Latin term: where Benedict writes *infirmum fratrem* (RSB 28.5), the reformer chooses *þone untruman and þone leahterfullan broðor*, "the sick and the wicked brother" (BR 52.16-17). The original passes no judgment – Benedict encourages wise, patient care. Æthelwold's translation, however, is far less lenient but also more suited for the context, since the paragraph is about misbehaving monks.

There are many more examples of doublets, scattered throughout the *Rule*:<sup>60</sup> *ancsum and neara*, "difficult and narrow," (BR 20.10) for *angustia* (RSB 5.11); *sohte and funde*, "sought and found," (BR 51.19) for *quaerere* (RSB 27.8); *frouer and fultum*, "help and support," (BR 55.15) for *solatia* (RSB 31.17); *gedeorfe and miclum geswince*, "with difficulty and much toil," (BR 59.15-16) for *gravi labore* (RSB 35.13); *fyrðrige and weaxan læte*, "promote and let grow," (BR 121.7) for *permittat nutrir*; the alliterating pair *his dædum and domum*, "his deeds and laws," (BR 126.10) for *iudiciis suis* (RSB 65.22); and *misfop and fram rihtum geleafan bugan*, "to mistake and bend from the right faith," (BR 65.5) for *apostatare* (RSB 40.7). All of these contrastive pairs are unique to the *Rule*, according to a search of the Dictionary of Old English Corpus, and clear evidence of Æthelwold's desire to widen and enrich Old English vocabulary through translation the creation of a "Winchester" lexicon.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 114.

Besides employing alliteration within doublets, Æthelwold also embraces this poeticism by inserting repeated sounds in other phrases and sentences. In almost every example, the Latin words being translated do not themselves possess features of internal rhyme: the translator makes a conscious decision to interweave a particularly Anglo-Saxon lyricism while maintaining relative fidelity to his source text. Along with a sense of tradition, one reason for adopting this style is because of the target audience's familiarity with it. Rather than forcing Old English sentence structures into Latinate grammatical norms, Æthelwold chooses to replace features of the source text with a lyrical quality that will help his readership identify more strongly with the text. Here is a lengthy example from Chapter 53, featuring the bishop expertly using rhetorical embellishments that exceed those of his Latin source:

Sy þam abode se mæste hogu þæs andfenges þearfena and  
elpeodigra, forþan Crist us on hy swiðost bið onfangen; ðara ricra  
manna ege and hoga gemyngað, þæt him selfum weorðlice sy  
gegearwod and wyrðmynt genoh geboden, ac Godes ege ana  
myndgað, þæt mon þearfum and elpeodegum monnum gepensum  
sy.

The abbot shall take the greatest care in receiving poor people and  
foreigners, because it is in these in particular, that Christ is received;  
the awe and terror which the rich and powerful inspire, ensures that  
they are honourably provided for and received with sufficient

honour, but the fear of God alone ensures that we are helpful to poor people and foreigners.<sup>61</sup>

Benedict's original and a more neutral translation are

Pauperum et peregrinorum maxime susceptioni cura sollicite exhibeatur, quia in ipsis magis Christis suscipitur; nam divitum terror ipse sibi exigit honorem.

In the reception of the poor and of pilgrims the greatest care and solicitude should be shown, because in them Christ is more especially received: for the very awe we have of the rich insures that they receive honor.

Æthelwold's rendering adds both content and rhetorical features: the insertion of "ac Godes ege ana myndgað, þæt mon þearfum and elpeodegum monnum gepensum sy" is a typical amplification of the target text that guides readers towards better understanding of the original instruction. In addition, the bishop hyperalliterates on a few sounds in particular, including "þ/ð," especially in the first half of the passage, as well as "s," "f," "w," and front vowels. There are also alliterating doublets in this translation: "ege and hoga" for *terror* and "weorðlice sy gegearwod and wyrðmynt genoh geboden" for *divitum*.

Æthelwold's expansion and the use of alliteration creates a number of parallel structures that guide the reader's interpretation of the passage.

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<sup>61</sup> Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 115.

I will include one last example of Æthelwold using alliteration, wordplay, and doublets to domesticate and ornament his translation. At the close of his rendering of Benedict's original prologue, the bishop's translation method becomes more idiosyncratic and less literal. Gretsich comments that "many of the Latin syntactical constructions would have posed considerable difficulties for any attempt to combine close translation and an idiomatic English prose style," so rather than unnecessarily restrict himself to a translation practice that would fail either to do justice to the original or provide his audience with the necessary information, Æthelwold deviates in order to preserve what meaning he can in a rather pleasingly complex arrangement of uniquely Anglo-Saxon linguistic features. The beginning of the conclusion to Benedict's prologue reads

Constituenda est ergo nobis dominici scola seruitii. In qua institutione nihil asperum, nihil graue nos constituros speramus. Sed et si quid paululum restrictius dictante aequitatis ratione propter emendationem uitiorum uel conseruationem caritatis processerit, non ilico pauore perterritus refugias uiam salutis...

We have therefore, to establish a school of the Lord's service. In instituting it we hope to establish nothing harsh or oppressive. But if anything is somewhat strictly laid down, according to the dictates of equity and for the amendment of vices or for the preservation of love; do not therefore flee in dismay from the way of salvation.

Æthelwold's translation follows – I have used italics to indicate alliteration and doublets:

*Tōþi þenne ic eornestlice settan wille bysega and bigengas þysses  
drihtenlican þeowdomes. Þeah hwet teartlices hwæþwara stiðlice on  
þisum regule, the ures færyldes latteow to Criste is, geset and getæht sy,  
for gesceades rihtinge and for synna bote and soðere sibbe  
gehealdsumnesse, ne beo þu þurh þi forþ and afæred, ne þurh yrhþe ðinre  
hæle weg ne forlæt;*

I therefore intend indeed to establish the occupation and observance of this service of the Lord. Even though in this Rule which is the guide for our journey to Christ some rather severe stipulations are instituted and taught somewhat harshly, for the guidance of reason and the remedy of sins, and for the preservation of true peace, this should not intimidate or frighten you nor [should you] through cowardice leave the way that leads to your salvation;<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps the most significant, but not surprising, change to the content of the original *Rule* is the reform leader's preference for the first person "ic" in lieu of Benedict's more catholic "nobis." The end of the prologue is a reasonable place for Æthelwold to assert his authority, particularly as the primary architect for this English version of the Benedictine order's most sacred text. The other translation changes are quite noticeable, especially where hyperalliteration piles up one word

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<sup>62</sup> Gretsch, *Intellectual Foundations*, 119.

after another. For instance, “for synna bote and soðere sibbe gehealdsumnesse” is a prominent example of similar sounds being brought together simply for the sake of lyricism and the translator’s preference. Æthelwold is not showing off, exactly, but his ample skills in Old English and Latin prose are showcased in this passage nonetheless.

Another striking aspect of the bishop’s translation at this point, but by no means limited to this one paragraph, is its focus on rhythm – this closing passage of the prologue resembles the “rhythmic prose” that is most often associated with Æthelwold’s students, Ælfric and Wulfstan.<sup>63</sup> The propagation of doublets, alliteration, parallelisms, rare words, and other paronomastic linguistic features in such close proximity to each other creates a musical pattern of sorts. It is not a pattern as narrowly defined as Ælfric’s, which is composed of rhythmical pairs linked by alliteration across a long line, but it is marked by a predilection for two-stress units held together in larger arrangements.<sup>64</sup> This tight structuring carries readers along as they interpret the text, and it also allows the bishop to transform the act of translation into firsthand literary creation in its own right.

One last facet of Æthelwold’s translation style that I would like to excavate is his reliance both on rare or unusual words--often borrowed or adapted from

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<sup>63</sup> Other particularly rhythmical passages in the Old English *Benedictine Rule* include parts of Chapter 2, on the qualities of a good abbot, Chapter 4, which describes a good, Christian life, and the final chapter of the *Rule*.

<sup>64</sup> For more information on Ælfric’s rhythmical prose, see Peter Clemoes, “Ælfric” in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), especially at 202-6. The best study about Wulfstan’s style is A. McIntosh’s essay “Wulfstan’s Prose,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 34 (1948), 109-42, especially at 116-24.



Latin and, occasionally, Greek – and groups of synonyms or near-synonyms for translating particular terms. As I mentioned earlier, scholars link this penchant with the bishop’s clear admiration and emulation of the hermeneutic style as practiced and popularized by Aldhelm. In fact, most of what scholars term “Winchester vocabulary” seems to stem from this same facet of Æthelwold’s literary and scholarly habits. It must be remembered that one hallmark of Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry is its near obsession with variation and repetition, the blending of which is responsible for the language’s musicality and its unique mode of expression. In order to be true to the roots of the vernacular while also using his linguistic knowledge as a theologian and scholar, Æthelwold litters his translation of the *Rule* with an array of distinct terms and trees of synonyms.

To return briefly to the prologue just discussed above, there are several examples of hermeneutic tendencies at work in this section. One such compound is *rumheort*, the core of the phrase “mid rumheortum mode” (BR 5.22), which translates the Latin *dilatato corde* (RSB *Prologue*, line 49). This Old English term appears in *Beowulf*, twice, and in a few glosses, where it always means something like “generous” or “liberal.” However, it seems that Æthelwold intends for the word to be understood literally as “with enlarged heart,” indicated by the inserted phrase “se weg is rum and fordþeald, þe to deaðe and to hellewite læt” [the way is broad and inclined which leads to death and the torments of hell]. The wordplay put into effect by the bishop’s choices here is quite extraordinary, for it makes use of Benedict’s original text and its implied wordplay connecting *angusto*

*initio incipienda* with *dilatato corde*: the bishop undoubtedly recognized these references to Matthew 7: 13-14 and sought a way to bring out a similar level of interplay in his translation. He thus invoked the common meaning of *rumheort* while also emphasizing its literal qualities.

Another interesting word in the conclusion of the prologue is the *hapax legomenon* *leafleoht*, a compound that has given scholars some interpretive troubles for decades. Here it is in the context of the passage:

...ac þa geþingþa halegera mægena and se gewuna þisse halgan  
drohtnunge, ðe gedep leafleoht and eaþe, þæt ðe ær earfoðe and  
ancsumlic þuhte;

...but the dignity of holy virtue and the practice of this holy way of  
life will let appear agreeably easy and smooth what before seemed  
difficult and painful to you;

Bosworth and Toller and Hall agree that the likely meaning is “easy to believe,” as the result of the Latin sentence “Processu vero conversationis et fideo...” [Truly as we advance in this way of life and faith...] (RSB *Prologue*, line 49). Gretsch, however, argues that because of textual corruption the original word was *leafleoht* and means “easy” or “light,” a synonym that is attached to “eaþe” as part of a doublet and, in its original form, would have alliterated.<sup>65</sup> Even if this is the case, the term is still one-of-a-kind.

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<sup>65</sup> *Intellectual Foundations*, 120-21.

Æthelwold's hermeneutic vocabulary can usually be understood by appealing either to root-words or the context in which the terminology is embedded, or both. So even as the bishop is helping to expand the Old English lexicon, he provides readers with the tools and clues needed for interpreting his neologisms and loan-words. One example is the word *arwesa*, meaning "respected" or, in direct address situations, "Your Honour." Outside of the *Rule*, it is found twice in the poem "Seasons for Fasting." The term is a compound of *ar*, or "honor," and a derivation of a form of *wesan*, the verb "to be." It is a part of the doublet *leof and arwesa* in Chapter 63, where *leof* is the more typical noun used for addressing superiors and is best translated as "Sir" — *arwesa* translates the Latin term *paterna reverentia*. There is also *unweorchardum* in Chapter 58, usually meaning "delicate, weakly," and unique to the *Rule*. Æthelwold uses it in this instance as part of the doublet *mearewum and þam unweorchardum* to translate the Latin phrase *infirmis aut delicatis*, "infirm and delicate." The Old English term is formed by joining the common negative prefix *un-*, the noun *weorc*, "work," and the adjective *heard*, "hard"; it is further clarified paronomasimatically by the insertion of *weorc* later in the same clause: *þæm mearewum and þam unweorchardum tæce heom mon sum weorc*, "to the delicate and weakly one shall order some work."

By appealing to his knowledge of multiple languages, the reformer can also widen the scope of his synonyms and attain more nuanced levels of significations. This allows him, therefore, to differentiate between figural and literal situations by choosing specific words. One example is his treatment of the Latin word *corona*.

When he encounters this term in a metaphorical context, such as “corona vitae aeterna,” or “the crown of eternal life,” he renders it with *wuldorbeag*, a compound of “splendor” and “crown.”<sup>66</sup> When translating more literally, for instance in the phrase “corona regi,” “crown of a king,” Æthelwold chooses *helm* or *cynhelm*, both of which are relatively common in other Old English texts. Another common term in the Latin *Rule* is *honor*, and the bishop chooses different synonyms for God’s honor than for the honor of secular persons. There are three synonyms in particular: *arweorþness*, *wyrþmynt* and *weorþscipe*. When referring to God, Æthelwold uses *arweorþness*, eleven times; *wyrþmynt* refers to secular honor twice, and *weorþscipe* just once.<sup>67</sup> These are subtle strategies that hint at the bishop’s keen interest in, and mastery of, languages. Ælfric uses all of these terms, especially in his homilies, and takes advantage of both metaphorical and literal meanings established by his mentor. No other Old English writer was as devoted to the precept of *differentiae* and because of Æthelwold’s efforts the lexicon of the English vernacular received a significant boost.

## **J. Manipulating Source Text for Political/Ecclesiastical Reasons**

Most of Æthelwold’s outright changes to the *Rule* deal with administrative matters, providing more details about the ranks and duties of monks, for example, and instructions for interacting with the outside world. These types of deviations are not the result of error or even always political or theological machinations. The

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<sup>66</sup> Gretsche notes that “wuldorbeag” and its ver form, “(ge)wuldorbeagian” have no currency in texts outside those identified with the Winchester school, in *Intellectual Foundations*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

*Rule* is as much a how-to-be-a-monk primer as it is a repository for the religious musings of St. Benedict, and since Æthelwold has high hopes for his new generation of initiates, it is necessary that he expand or intrude upon Benedict's thoughts every now and then with some rather mundane but crucial instructions for the running of monasteries – and nunneries – in tenth century England. At first reading, these additions seem to tell scholars more about the bishop of Winchester's organizational and hierarchical insights than his translation practice or theory. However, all of these changes, when added up, equal a sufficiently bulky amount of text to earn some consideration. Translation historian and theorist Antoine Berman has written at length about how seemingly innocent manipulations of a source text impinge on the original author's designs and should not be dismissed out of hand. In his groundbreaking essay "Translation and the Trial of the Foreign," Berman observes of additions to translated texts in general

Now from the viewpoint of the text, this expansion can be qualified as "empty." ...I mean that the addition adds nothing, that it augments only the gross mass of text, without augmenting its way of speaking or signifying. The addition is no more than babble designed to muffle the work's own voice. Explications may render the text more "clear," but they actually obscure its own mode of

clarity. The expansion is, moreover, a stretching, a slackening, which impairs the rhythmic flow of the work.<sup>68</sup>

While it seems true on the surface that adding a passage about the correct rituals for voting in a new abbot “impairs the rhythmic flow” of Benedict’s original *Rule*, translators in Anglo-Saxon England have never shown much concern for replicating any authorial concept as amorphous as “flow.” Even Ælfric’s translation of *Genesis* disturbs his scriptural source by leaving out entire catalogue passages. And, as I have already shown in the previous chapter, Alfred’s renderings are a tissue of translation and addition and manipulation. Thus it is no surprise, and no great sin, that Æthelwold would take it upon himself to update the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Gretsich notes some general trends in his pleonastic insertions:

When we attempt a stylistic comparison of the OE Rule and the Latin original we are struck by the numerous additions Æthelwold introduced. Usually they are fairly brief, ranging from a few words to a few lines. They are particularly frequent where the Rule deals with fundamental questions of monastic life, such as the rank and dignity of the members of a monastic community as opposed to conditions in secular life; the precedence that the *opus dei* should take over all other occupations; the monastic vows of obedience, poverty

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<sup>68</sup> Antoine Berman, “Translation and Trials of the Foreign,” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2012), 246.

and humility; or the duty of the monastic community to care for the poor. They also take the form of explanatory remarks where Benedict's Latin instructions are not quite clear or easily understandable.<sup>69</sup>

Since she is more concerned with the Latin version of the *Rule* from which Æthelwold was translating, Gretsch does not take much time to examine these patterns in Æthelwold's translation against the original *Rule*, instead choosing to marginalize her brief analysis into footnotes. However, a few examples will suffice to illustrate the nature of some of these administrative and explanatory expansions.

One administrative matter of particular importance for the bishop's long-term goals involves the interference of the laity in monastic affairs. This aversion to outside influence led Æthelwold to shift the emphases of a few passages in Benedict's original. In Chapter 64, for example, Benedict explains how a monastic community can rectify the election of an unworthy or otherwise unfit abbot. He writes:

Quod si etiam omnis congregatio vitiis suis — quod quidem absit — consentientem personam pari consilio elegerit, et vitia ipsa aliquatenus in notitia episcopi, ad cuius dioecesim pertinent locus ipse vel ad abates aut christianos vicinos claruerint, prohibeant

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<sup>69</sup> "Æthelwold's Translation of the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* and its Latin Exemplar," *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974): 143-44.

pravorum praevalere consensum, sed domui Dei dignum constituent dispensatorem, scientes pro hoc se recepturos mercedem bonam, si illud caste et zelo Dei faciant, sicut e diverso peccatum si neglegant.

But even if it were the entire community that acted together in electing a person (and may this never happen!) who consented to their vices, if these vices somehow came to the notice of the bishop in whose diocese the place belongs, or if they were perceived by the neighboring abbots or Christians, then they would be obliged to prevent this depraved consensus from prevailing and to constitute instead a worthy steward for the house of God, knowing that for this they will receive a good reward if acting purely and out of zeal for God; and that to neglect this would on the contrary be sinful.

Æthelwold translates:

Gif hit þonne swa getimað, þæt eal geferræden anmodum geþeahte þone to abode gecyst, the hyra leahtrum geþeafige and him on gewil gange, and þæt þurh æfeste men and rihtgelyfedum cūþ bið þam bioscope, the seo halige stow on his bisceoprice is, forebode he and alecge þa þwyrnesse hyra ungeþeahtes and mid fultume abboda and rihtgelyfedra manna gesette þæne and gehadige to ðam dihte abbodhades, þe Godes hus wel fadige and on Godes riht gange and na on þweorra manna gewil; wite ægþer ge bisceop ge þa rihtgelyfedan, þæt hy micelle mede æt Gode habbað, gif hy swa doð



mid Godes ege, eac swylce micel wite, gif hi on gepafunge gað and  
for gymeleaste hit ne betað.

If it then happens that the whole community should agree to choose  
a person as their abbot who acquiesces in their vices and acts  
according to their wishes, and, by pious and orthodox Christians,  
this comes to the knowledge of the bishop in whose diocese that holy  
place is, the bishop shall forbid and suppress the perversity of their  
wicked decision, and with the help of abbots and orthodox  
Christians he shall appoint and consecrate a person to the office of  
the abbot who will competently preside over the house of God and  
on God's right track and not according to the will of evil men; both  
the bishop and the faithful know that he has a great reward in God,  
if he does so with God's influence, so also [he has] great punishment,  
if he goes with consent and does not repara [the decision] for  
negligence.

Quantitatively, Æthelwold's passage is much longer than Benedict's: the  
original has 65 words while the translation uses 117, almost double. According to  
Berman, this sort of "Quantitative Impoverishment" creates a text that is "at once  
poorer and larger," but this viewpoint does not take into account the actual  
linguistic differences between Latin and Old English, especially the former's lack

of articles/pronouns and the latter's preference for these same words.<sup>70</sup> Articles and pronouns are responsible for some of these extra words, but Æthelwold has inserted a number of phrases and words that speak to his own aims more than those of St. Benedict's, simultaneously deleting whatever distracts from his tone and agenda. The bishop expunges Benedict's expressive aside *quod quidem absit*, perhaps indicating his feelings that such elections are all too likely, and the result is a sterner, more authoritative set of instructions. Although Benedict is not clear how the bishop should be made aware of such a development, by using the term *aliquatenus*, Æthelwold leaves nothing to chance and specifies that the only appropriate source of this knowledge is "þurh æfeste men and rihtgelyfedum." The bishop's level of detail implies that impious or unvirtuous people might give false report – this is a warning, then, aimed at other bishops who will read the *Rule* and who will have to assert themselves when such a situation arises. These bishops are further instructed by the translator to "forbid and suppress the perversity of their wicked decision," which is stronger and more aggressive language than Benedict's generic advice to "prevent this depraved consensus from prevailing." Æthelwold next reorganizes the priorities of Benedict's instructions and demotes "fultume abboda and rihtgelyfedra manna" to mere advisory positions. Æthelwold wants full power in these matters to be retained by bishops themselves, while Benedict calls on any Christian witnesses to take some active role in an equal setting. The *Regularis Concordia*, in Chapter 9, defends the right of

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<sup>70</sup> "Translation & the Trial of the Foreign," 248.

monasteries to elect their own abbots, adding “cum regis consensus et consilio” [with the consent and advice of the King]. In order for the Benedictine reform to succeed, its leaders and their followers must be allowed to govern and organize themselves independently from regional politics — this is direct from page one of Æthelwold political playbook.

Another point of contention between Benedict and his translator is attitudes towards the divine service. In Chapter 42, Benedict provides a structure for silent times and communal readings:

Omni tempore silentium debent studere monachi, maxime tamen nocturnis horis. Et ideo omni tempore, sive ieiunii sive prandii: si tempus fuerit prandii, mox surrexerint a cena, sedeant omnes in unum et legat unus Collationes vel Vitas Patrum aut certe aliud quod aedificet audientes, non autem Heptateuchum aut Regum, quia infirmis intellectibus non erit utile illa hora hanc scripturam audire, aliis vero horis legantur.

At all times silence is to be studiously kept by monks, especially during the hours of night. And this is to be the case in all seasons, whether fast days or days with a noon meal: if it is a day with a noon meal, as soon as they have risen from dinner all are to be seated together and someone is to read from the *Conferences* or *Lives of the Fathers*, or something else which will edify the hearers; but not from the Heptateuch or the Book of Kings, because it will not be good for

those of weak understanding to hear these writings at that hour; they should be read at other times.

In two other passages—8.13 and 48.13—Benedict expressly encourages the use of psalms for *lectio divina*, but here he forbids meditating on Old Testament texts, providing an excuse that gets echoed in similar statements by Æthelwold and Ælfric.

Æthelwold has other thoughts on the matter, which indicates increased attention to biblical knowledge in the English Benedictine reform. His willingness to push aside Benedict's ruling in favor of his own is another indication of his aggressive translation style. He decrees,

On ælcne timan munecas swigan began scylan, þeah ealra swiðost on niht. Sam hy fasten, sam hy ne fasten, gif hit þonne beo seo tid æfengereordes, arisen hy sona, swa hy heora mete hæbben, and sitten on anre stowe, and ræde him mon þa raca oðþe lif þæra heahfædera, oðþe sum þing, þe hy to Gode tyhte. Ne ræde him mon nauðer ne Moyses boc, ne Regum, forðæm þæm unandgytfullum þæt gastlice angyt is earfoþe to understandende butan haligra manna trahtnunge; ræde hy mon þeah oþrum tidum on cirican, þonne hit togebyrige.

At all times monks should cultivate silence, yet especially at night.

Whether fasting or not fasting, if it is then the time of the evening-meal, after they have arisen, after they have had their food, and have

sat together in a place, a man should then read to them the *Expositions* or *Lives of the Holy Fathers*, or something, which is edifying to God. One shall not read to them either the book of Moses or the Books of Kings, because for the simple-minded the spiritual sense is difficult to understand without an exposition by holy men. These books shall be read, however, at other times, in divine service, where they pertain.

Æthelwold avoids literalism and deviates from Benedict's original to pronounce the prohibited books do have a place in the Eucharistic liturgy. He enforces this in other passages as well. Æthelwold specifies that it is the "gastlice andgyt" that eludes the simplistic hermeneutic efforts of many readers, whereas Benedict does not give such a detail. By the Anglo-Saxon period, the multiple levels of meaning ascribed to scriptural texts were an accepted feature of biblical exegesis: there was the literal – sometimes called historical – and the spiritual, which was subdivided into allegorical, anagogical and moral.<sup>71</sup> Æthelwold then supplies another reason in support of his own reform programs: in order to understand the deepest level of meaning hibernating in holy writ, "haligra manna," "holy men," are necessary, for only they can unlock God's Word for

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<sup>71</sup> For more information on Anglo-Saxon exegesis and the various levels of signification, see Alvin A. Lee, "Old English Poetry, Mediaeval Exegesis and Modern Criticism," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 8.1 (1975): 47-73; Joseph F. T. Kelly, "The Venerable Bede and Hiberno-Latin Exegesis," *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 65-75; *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture Volume 1*, Henri de Lubac, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), Chapter 1, "Theology, Scripture, and the Fourfold Sense," and Chapter 3, "Patristic Origins."

other readers. The bishop is also implying that he is one of those holy men and, by extension, he can draw forth the true meanings of the *Rule of St. Benedict* by way of his translation, perhaps even hermeneutic levels not apparent to the text's original author.

One example of Æthelwold manipulating the source text for the sake of his own ideas about monastic politics had originally been labeled as a translation error by Mechthild Gretsch, who eventually admits to underestimating “the degree to which Æthelwold’s active participation in both ecclesiastical and temporal politics influenced his Old English version of the Benedictine Rule—despite the restrictions imposed on him by his wish to produce a faithful translation.”<sup>72</sup> In Chapter 59 of the *Rule*, Benedict describes the processes involved in the oblation of children to monasteries:

De rebus autem suis, aut in praesenti petitione promittant sub  
iureiurando quia numquam per se, numquam per suffectam  
personam nec quolibet modo ei aliquando aliquid dant aut tribuunt  
occasionem habendi; vel certe si hoc facere noluerint et aliquid  
offerre volunt in eleemosynam monasterio pro mercede sua, faciant  
ex rebus quas dare volunt monasterio donationem, reservato sibi, si  
ita voluerint, usufructu. Atque ita Omnia obstruantur ut nulla  
suspicion remaneat puero per quam deceptus perire possit—quod  
absit—quod experimento didicimus.

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<sup>72</sup> “The Benedictine Rule in Old English,” 131.

With regard to his property in the same petition they are to promise under oath that they will never, either directly, through an intermediary, or in any other way give him anything or the means of having anything: or else, if they are unwilling to do this and wish to give something as a benefaction to the monastery to win their reward, they are to make a donation to the monastery or the property they wish to give, reserving to themselves, if they so wish the revenues. And thus let every way be blocked, so that no sort of expectation will remain by which the child might be deceived and perish (may it never happen!), which experience has taught us may happen.

Æthelwold translates:

Behaten þa magas and mid aþe gefæstnian, þæt hi næfre syndrige æhta hyra mæge ne gesellan, ne þurh hy sylfe ne þurh nænne gespelian, ne hy næfre nænne incan ne secen.... Gif hy þonne hwæt syllan willan, sellan hi þæt þære haligan stowe to rihtum gemænscipe, him to ecum edleane; and him siþþan sy wegnestes getiðad and swa mid wegnestes ham cyrran, gif hi þæs wilnien. Syn ealle þa æhta, þe þam cilde gebyrien, swa fordylegade and todælede, þæt him nan hyht beon ne þyrfe, þelæs þe he losige, gif he his hyht beset on syndrigum æhtum, þæt na ne geweorðe; we foroft onfundon, þæt mænig þurh þone hiht syndrigra æhta losode.

The kin promise and with oath confirm that they will never separately sell the possessions of their kinsman, not through themselves, nor through any other agent, nor will they ever seek to complain...If they want to give anything, they shall give it to the common ownership of the holy place, for their eternal reward, and they shall be given food for their journey if they want it, and with this food they shall return home. Let all the property, which belongs to the child, be as if destroyed and divided, so that there is no hope for him, nor need, lest he depart, if he sets his hope on separate property, so that it does not happen. We have too often found that many are lost through the hope of their own separate property.

The phrase that has attracted the most commentary from scholars is Benedict's *usufructu*, translated by Æthelwold with "wegnest." The original term has roots in legal discourse and means, literally, "life interest."<sup>73</sup> Outside of the *Rule*, it is only used in the Old English Bede and the translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*. Smaragdus of St. Mihiel discusses this crucial phrase in his commentary on the *Rule*, which scholars agree Æthelwold had access to.<sup>74</sup> There exists an extant copy of Smaragdus's commentary, likely written at Glastonbury in England, and dating from the mid-tenth century. The scholar clarifies

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<sup>73</sup> Gretsch, "Benedictine Rule in Old English," 132.

<sup>74</sup> See Gretsch, *Die Regula Sancti Benedicti in England und ihre altenglische Übersetzung*, TUEPh 2 (Munich, 1973), 257-62.



Usum fructum dicit quod nos dicimus usum fructuarium, id est illas res donent monasterio per testamentum sibi usu fructuario reservato. De quibus rebus solvent omni anno sibi indictum censum. He [Benedict] says *ususfructus* where we say *usus fructuarius*, which means they donate those things to the monastery in their testament after having reserved for themselves the usufruct; and they are to draw the appointed income every year.<sup>75</sup>

With Smaragdus as a guide, readers can interpret Benedict's original meaning quite easily: once a child has been accepted as an oblate, he or she cannot at any future point be gifted any personal effects or property as an individual; instead, all such gifts will be turned over to the monastery, to be used for the benefit of the community. If, in the case of land, the donating family would like to retain their essential revenue — *usufructu* — this is accommodated by Benedict's *Rule* annually after the signing of their testament. Benedict makes no literal mention of food in his orders, and although it was certainly customary for monastic houses to provide guests and travelers with sufficient repast, Æthelwold's is the only known translation of *usufructu* as food or provisions. The bishop of Winchester had access to the commentary and thus was familiar with this very passage: the question, then, is why would he knowingly "mistranslate"? The answer, as Gretsch finally admits, is that Æthelwold's interpretation was willfully deviant and did not

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<sup>75</sup> Latin and translation can be found in *Smaragdi abbatis Expositio in Regulam S. Benedicti*, ed. A. Spannagel and P. Engelbert, *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum* 7 (Siegburg, 1974), 300.

depend on any faulty understanding of his source text or Latin language. He used his translation as a way to reinforce his position – and that of the royal family, considering how often they sided with Benedictine’s on land deals – on the sanctity of monastery-owned lands.

In another section of the *Regularis Concordia*, Chapter 63, there is a passage providing instruction on the treatment of guests and here Æthelwold uses the Latin phrase *uictualium solatium*, showing that he can differentiate on the use of *usufructu* for “food” or “provisions.” Perhaps more compelling evidence against any accusation of error is his repetition of “wegnestes” in his original insertion to the source text, “and swa wegneste ham cyrren.” Æthelwold’s idiosyncratic translation reflects his longstanding concerns about the legacy of monastic property against outside, secular influences. It was not common, in secular transactions, for land to be given away forever, and the bishop takes it on himself to create new lines of ownership outside the normal authorities. Dorothy Whitelock has examined a number of tenth century texts and charters which she claims were written by Æthelwold and all of which, using nearly identical language and logic, “warn urgently against transferring landed property belonging to a monastery into secular hands, even in the case of misconduct on the part of the abbot, abbess, or inmates of the monastery.”<sup>76</sup> The use of “wegnest” severely limits the rights of donators despite the relatively liberal wording Benedict enlists. Æthelwold again shows that he is willing to twist his source text

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<sup>76</sup> Gretsch, “Benedictine Rule in Old English,” 134.

in order to promote his own brand of ecclesiastical politicking. Throughout his career, the bishop eagerly enriches monastic land holdings, even attempting to reclaim from generations of secular owners lands that might have been property of the Church before the Viking period. Many scholars refer to his land-grabbing tactics as “ruthless,” and it is clear he was similarly aggressive in his style of translation as he maneuvered the parents of oblates into weaker positions by stripping them of their usufructuary rights. But would all other readers of the *Rule* have been equally willing to twist the words of their order’s founder? Æthelwold had the foresight to include a clause in Chapter 63 of the *Regularis Concordia* that ultimately grants him a free hand if a change is made “ob animae salute uirtutumque potius custodiam quam ad regulae contemptum” [not indeed out of contempt of the Rule but for the good of souls and the safeguard of virtues]. However, translation scholars have not mentioned how this reflects in miniature the bishop’s theory and practice: as long as the changes he makes to the *Rule of St. Benedict* are intended for the betterment of the spiritual lives of English people, Æthelwold has nearly free reign. There is more at stake in the bishop’s choices than the integrity of a single document: the Benedictine Reform was a type of religious and scholarly revolution instigated for reintegrating monastic orders into English society. The doctrines of the *Rule* represent the core values of this movement, values that had to be adapted to suit the time and place.

## K. Chapter-level Changes

The copy of the *Rule* in the same manuscript as “King Edgar’s Establishment of Monasteries,” Cotton Faustina A.x, has a number of more significant changes, with Chapters 1, 60, and 62 getting severe make-overs. Scholarly consensus asserts that the deviances in Chapter 60 and 62 indicate Æthelwold had a female audience in mind for this particular version of the *Rule* and that the bishop was personally responsible for adapting Benedict’s original for this gender. Besides nominal changes to pronouns and other gendered language, some of the original wording has been rephrased to remove content apparently deemed unnecessary for female members of monastic communities. Chapter 1, however, has other changes that do not seem dependent on the assumed gender of any audience. Instead, Æthelwold’s translation is the result of his own personal convictions, and an extension of his political and ecclesiastical maneuvering.

Benedict’s first chapter provides details about the four different kinds of monks, and his inclusion of this information at the start of the *Rule* indicates the importance he attached to the topic. Æthelwold disregards Benedict’s discussion, however, and instead inserts his translation of a similar section on monks from Isidore’s *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, specifically Book II, Chapter 16, titled *De monachis*. The first sentence of Æthelwold’s translation in the Cotton manuscript introduces his deviation from Benedict: “Syx synt muneca cynerena, þara synt þreo þa selestan, þa oþere þreo þa forcupestan and eallum gemete to forbugenne” [There are six kinds of monks, of those six three are the best, the other three are the worst

and all are fit to avoid]. Benedict's original list consists of the *coenobitae*, the *anachoritae* or *eremitae*, which he classifies together, the *sarabaitae*, and the *gyrovagi*. One distinction made by the archbishop of Seville is the addition of a two more types of monks, the *circumcelliones*, similar to what Benedict labels the *gyrovagi*, and the *pseudo-anchorites*, those who falsely adopt the title of this order but do not adhere to its venerable standards. This latter type may have carried more importance in tenth-century England due to the reform leaders' overt desires for a more regulated monastic system. As Rohini Jayatilaka observes, there is evidence of Anglo-Saxon women practicing as unorthodox anchorites both singly and as part of tiny communities.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the argument can be made, against Gretsch's protestations, that one instigating factor in Æthelwold's choice of Chapter 16 of *De ecclesiasticis officiis* is its relevancy for an audience of female monastics.

Isidore's description uses Benedict as its source but the reason for the switch by the translator is that Isidore is particularly venomous when describing the *sarabaites*, who Benedict only places as the second-worst kind of monk, before the *gyrovagues*. In his original, Benedict describes them thus:

Tertium vero monachorum taeterriumum genus est sarabaitarum,  
qui nulla regula approbati, experiential magistra, sicut aurum  
fornacis, sed in plumbi natura molliti, adhuc operibus servanes  
saeculo fidem, mentiri Deo per tonsuram noscuntur. Qui bini aut

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<sup>77</sup> See her essay "The Old English Benedictine Rule: Writing for Men and Women," in *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003): 147-87.

terni aut certe singuli sine pastore, non dominicis sed suis inclusi ovilibus, pro lege eis est desideriorum voluntas, cum quicquid putaverint vel elegerint, hoc dicunt sanctum, et quod noluerint, hoc putant non licere.

The third and most detestable kind of monks are the Sarabaites, who have neither been tried by a Rule nor taught by experience like gold in the furnace; instead they are as soft as lead, faithful servants of the world in their works, obviously lying to God by their tonsure. Living in twos or threes, or even singly without a shepherd, they enclose themselves not in the Lord's sheepfolds but in their own. Their law consists in their own willful desires: whatever they think fit or choose to do, that they call holy; and what they dislike, that they regard as unlawful.

Benedict's language is already harsh and his condemnation is clear: this type of monk is bad because they deny a *Rule* and put personal desire, especially for material wealth and goods, above God's commands. However, when he moves onto the *gyrovagues*, Benedict declares they are "semper vagi et numquam stabiles, et propriis voluntatibus et gulae illecebris servientes, et per Omnia deteriores sarabaitis," [always wondering and never stable; slaves of self-will and the attractions of gluttony; in all things they are worse than the sarabaites]. These infractions earn more ire from the saint than the falsities of the *sarabaites*.

This hierarchy displeased Æthelwold because the vices of the *sarabaites* apparently resembled activities the bishop had been fighting against in his push for the Benedictine reform, particularly during his campaign against church canons that had usurped too many positions of power. Æthelwold used the *EEM* to declare their abuses of church authority had been ended by Edgar, although it was the bishop himself who kicked them out of the minsters, and then he decides that Benedict's description isn't quite tough enough of a condemnation. Isidore writes

Sextum genus est monachorum, et ipsum teterrimum atque neglectum, quod per Ananiam et Saphiram in exordio Ecclesiae pullulavit, et apostoli Petri severitate succisum est, quique ab eo, quod semetipsos a coenobiali disciplina sequestrant, suasque appetunt liberi voluptates, Ægyptiorum lingua sarabaitae, sive remobothitae nuncupantur. Construunt enim sibi cellulas, easque falso nomine monasteria nuncupant, liberique ab imperio seniorum, arbitrio suo vivunt, certatim in opera laborantes, non ut indigentibus distribuant, sed ut acquirant pecunias, quas recondant, et sicut ait de ipsis Hieronymus, quasi ars sit sancta, non vita, quidquid vendiderint, majoris est pretii. Re vera — ut idem dicit — solent certare jejuniis, ut rem secreti victoriae faciant. Apud hos affectata sunt omnia, fluxae manicae, caligae follicantes, vestes grossior, crebra

suspiria, visitatio virginum, detractio clericorum, et si quando dies festus venerit, satiantur ad vomitum.

The sixth category of monks is itself the worst and neglected one that sprouted at the origin of the church through Ananias and Sapphira and was cut down by the severity of the apostle Peter. From the fact that they themselves withdraw from the cenobitic discipline and follow their own free wills, these are called in the language of the Egyptians *sarabaitae* or those who refuse. They construct cells for themselves and call them by the false name of monasteries. Free from the rule of elders, they live by their own desire, laboring in works certainly not to distribute them to the poor but to acquire monies which they hoard. As Jerome says about them, as a work of art may be holy but not the life [of the artist], whatever they sell is more expensive. In truth, as Jerome also says, they usually contend in fasting, and they make this thing of secrecy a thing of victory. Among them all things are affected, he says, loose sleeves, flapping boots, thicker clothing, frequent sighs, visitation of virgins, detraction of clerics, and whenever a feast day comes they fill themselves until they vomit.<sup>78</sup>

Æthelwold translates

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<sup>78</sup> Translation taken from *Isidore of Seville: De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, edited and translated by Thomas L. Knoebel (Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2008), 87.



Pæt sixte muneca cyn is ealra for cupos and swiðost forsewen, þæt  
 asprang on anginne cristendomes þurh Annanian and Saphiran, and  
 mid þes apostoles Petres reþnysse wurdon forslægene, forþam þe hy  
 ascyriað hy sylfe fram mynsterlicum þeawum and heora agenum  
 lustum filiaþ, hy synt egyptiscan gereorde genemnede sarabagite  
 odðte renuite, þæt ys sylfedeman and widersacan. Hi tymbriaþ him  
 stowa and hy leasum naman mynstra hataþ, nellað hy ealdras  
 habban ne be heora tecinge libban on þeowdome, ac be heora  
 agenum lustum; to geflites hi swincað on weorce, no toþi, þæt hi  
 heora geswinces gestreon þearfum delen, ac þæt hy feoh gestrynen  
 and on hyrde lecgen; be heom cwyð Sanctus Hieronimus, swa hwæt  
 swa hy heora geswinces becypaþ, þæt byþ maran wyrðes, swilce  
 heora cræft sy halig and na heora life. Soþlice, se sylfa Hieronimus  
 be heom cwyþ, to geflites hy fæstaþ and, þæt digle þing beon scolde,  
 to sige, þæt is to bodunge and to getotes gylpe gewyrcaþ. Hy gelyst  
 ealces ydeles, habbaþ side earmellan and pohhede hosa, stiþe reaf  
 gelomlice hy anscuniaþ, fæmnhadesmen hi geneosiaþ, preostas  
 tælaþ and þonne freolstid biþ, þy beoþ oferfyllde oþ spiweþan.  
 The sixth kind of monk is the most despicable and exceedingly  
 contemptible of all, that sprang forth at the beginning of Christianity  
 through Annanian and Saphiran, and was harshly halted by the  
 apostle Peter. Because they separate themselves from the monastic

practice and follow their own lusts, they are in the Egyptian language named “sarabaites” or “renuities,” that is self-ruled and apostate. They build themselves a place and call it the false name of “monastery”; they will not have elders nor live under the care of their teachings, but (follow) their own desires. Too eagerly they toil at work, not so that by their work they can distribute wealth to the needy, but so that they may acquire riches and add to their holdings; about them St. Jerome says whatsoever they sell of their work is extremely expensive, just as their work may be and not their life. Truly, Jerome himself says about them, they fast as a contest and, what should be a secretive thing, as a victory. They perform that proudly, too boastfully and too assertively. They are eager for every frivolity, have ample sleeves and loose leg-hoses; they often shun rough garments, visit virgins, rebuke priests, and, when it is feast-tide, they stuff themselves until they vomit.

The bishop retains all of Benedict’s points while adding a few more details of his own. He includes some history about the founding of this order of monks that segues into a brief etymological statement. The reformer highlights the sarabaites’ lack of a master, as well as their false appearance, and adds a sentence condemning their non-communal life-style. Æthelwold’s use of *renuities*, meaning “apostate,” for the source text’s word *remobothitae* broadcasts his complete refutation of their way of life, and it signals a departure from even the more

vitriolic description of Isidore. When he describes the *sarabaites'* uncharitable use of wealth acquired through their handicrafts and their preference for showy expressions of their faith, he relies on adverbial phrases to carry the weight of his disdain, tying it all together with "to": "to geflites," used twice, "to sige," "to bodunge," and "to getotes." Isidore's section is all the more authoritative for invoking an even more prestigious Church father, namely Jerome. The passage's final sentence is a list-like unfolding of other unsavory actions and characteristics of the *sarabaites* that is completely absent from Benedict's original *Rule* but which help Æthelwold imply that the only good type of monk is one that strictly adheres to Benedictine standards for dress, ceremony, and even eating.

Æthelwold even uses his own neologism to translate *sarabaites*, opting for "sylfdemena" or "self-ruled." He also shows creativity and ingenuity when translating the Latin titles for the other types of monks. Rather than borrowing the Latin *koenobitarum*, Æthelwold chooses the uncommon compound "mynstermonna," literally meaning "minster-man." When rendering *anachoritarum* and *heremitarum*, Æthelwold combines a loan word with an Old English term that functions as a gloss: "Oþer cyn is ancena, þæt is westensetlena" [Another kind (of monk) is the anchorite, that is the desert-dweller]. For the fourth category of monks, *gyrovagues*, Æthelwold denotes "widscriþul," meaning "wide wandering" as opposed to the original's meaning of "to wander in circles." This chapter also contains a fine example of the bishop's hermeneutic styling in the form of a rare Old English word that only appears twice in the Anglo-Saxon

corpus. When translating the Latin phrase *in primordiis suis feruore*, meaning “with fervor in their beginning,” Æthelwold chooses “frumwylm,” or “first fervor.” The only other occurrence of this word is in *Bald’s Leechbook*, in the form of “frumwelme,” where it is assumed to mean “first inflammation.” The rewriting of an entire chapter is no small matter but perhaps Æthelwold felt justified because Isidore’s text can almost be viewed as a commentary on Benedict’s. What’s more, this insertion from Isidore includes a short summary of critical doctrines in the *Rule*, providing easy reading material for both the king and those *ungelæreden inlendisce*. In the end, the first chapter of Æthelwold’s *Rule* is more than twice the length of Benedict’s original beginning but this is a different type of expansion than Berman’s concept of “Quantative Impoverishment.” These changes showcase both the changing nature of monastic practice since Benedict’s day and the bishop’s willingness to deviate in his translation not as a way to make a challenging text easier for his target audience but because his source does not fit well enough with his own goals and ideals.

The changes the bishop makes in his translation of Chapter 60 are relatively minor in comparison to his appropriation of Benedict’s first chapter. Mechthild claims “alterations in Chapter 60 are limited to the re-phrasing of individual sentences and expressions which are of no relevance to nunneries.”<sup>79</sup> The early Middle English text of the Wells-Fragment agrees with Cotton Faustina A. x for this chapter as well as Chapter 62, although it translates Benedict’s original text for

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<sup>79</sup> “The Benedictine Rule in Old English,” 151.

Chapter 1.<sup>80</sup> The first sentence of Benedict's Latin for Chapter 60 reads "Si quis de ordine sacerdotum in monasterio se suscipi rogaverit, non quidem citius ei assentiatur" [If anyone ordained to the priesthood asks to be received into the monastery, assent should not be granted him too quickly]. Other versions of *Æthelwold's Rule* not contained in Cotton Faustina A. x translate this line as "Gif hywlc mæssepreost wilnað, þæt hine mon to munuchade to mynstre underfo, ne sy him na ðe raþor getiþad forþy þe he mæssepreost is" [If a priest asks to be received into a monastery as a monk, permission should not be granted him too readily only because he is a priest]. Besides the addition of a few words that fit with *Æthelwold's* attitude towards priests, this translation is a close rendering. The deviant version of Chapter 60, however, reads "Gif hwylc abbod oþþe ealdor gewilnaþ of canonica endebyrdnesse, þæt hy mon on muneca mynstre underfon, sy him na þe raðor getiþod for heora ealdorscypes arwyrþnesse" [If some abbot or senior person from a community of canons asks to be received into a monastery this should not be granted them too readily out of deference for their superior status].<sup>81</sup> Again, the bishop has targeted canons in his rendering, although the overall changes are otherwise minimal. The rest of Chapter 60's contents are similarly close to Benedict's text, with some nouns and pronouns feminized, in keeping with a female readership. The most unusual aspect of this chapter,

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<sup>80</sup> Schröder includes Chapters 50-64 of the Wells-Fragment in *Die Angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen Der Benediktinerregel*.

<sup>81</sup> See Mechthild, "The Benedictine Rule in Old English," 151, for the translation of this sentence from Chapter 60.

however, is that the Latin passages in the corresponding exemplar have been changed to match the divergent Old English translation. The bishop apparently wanted to preserve his new version in as many forms as possible, perhaps to ensure that his revised guidelines would be followed even if the Latin was consulted. This Latin edition can be found alongside its translation in BL Cotton Claudius D. iii, also known as the Winteney Version, dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Rather than adapting his regular hermeneutic Latin style to the existing source text, Æthelwold prefers clear sentence structures and a relatively simple lexical field – the Latin of the source is made to resemble nothing so much as the style of the Old English translation itself. This is a remarkably bold seizure of textual authority on the part of a vernacular translator grappling with a nearly sacrosanct spiritual source text and there are no comparable examples from other Anglo-Saxon writers in the period. Æthelwold thus provides an example of a translation effacing and retroactively replacing its source, and no explanation for the change is needed because a female community would not need to be concerned about male priests wanting to be a part of their order.

#### **L. Translation of Scripture**

The anxieties surrounding the translation of scripture are well-known and amply documented by scholars, especially in the Anglo-Saxon period when one of the vernacular's earliest and most famous translators devotes passages in several of his prefaces to admitting his fear of tampering with holy writ. Because of his more diverse corpus and his surprisingly revealing prefaces, Ælfric has received

far more attention than his teacher, and his translation concerns are often presumed to be adequate indication of general trends for other Old English writers. In my next chapter, I will look more closely at these concerns but it is worthwhile to include a section at this juncture from the abbot's preface to his translation of Genesis. After having declared that this will be his last attempt at translating the Bible, even though he goes on to translate sections from several more books, Ælfric explains in detail his fears and how his translation style mitigates those fears:

Nu ys seo foresæde boc on manegum stowum swiþe nærolice  
gesett, and þeah swiðe deoplice on þam gastlicum andgite, and  
heo is swa geendebyrd, swa swa God silf hig gedihte þam writere  
Moise, and we ne durren na mare awritan on Englisc þonne þæt  
Leden hæfþ, ne þa endebirdnisse awendan, buton þam anum þæt  
þæt Leden and þæt Englisc nabbað na ane wisan on þære spræce  
fadunge. Æfre se þe awent oþþe se þe tæcþ of Ledene on Englisc,  
æfre he sceal gefadian hit swa þæt þæt Englisc hæbbe his agene  
wisn, elles hit biþ swiþe gedwolsum to rædenne þam þe þæs  
Ledenes wisn ne can.

Now the aforesaid book is very narrowly set in many places, and yet very profoundly in the spiritual sense, and it is ordered just as God himself appointed it to the writer Moses, and we do not dare to write more in English than the Latin has, nor change the order,

except for that alone, that Latin and English do not have a single way in the ordering of language. Always whoever translates or teaches from Latin into English must ever order it so that the English has its own way, otherwise it is very misleading for those to read who do not know the ways of Latin.<sup>82</sup>

Ælfric's explanation resembles commentary on translation from various patristic figures, especially Jerome in his "Letter to Pammachius," but he seems also to be aware of the same issues raised by Æthelwold in "King Edgar's Establishment of Monasteries." Both Anglo-Saxon figures focus on "þam gastlicum andgite" as the source of potential problems for translators: even if the spiritual sense is faithfully rendered in a new tongue, readers might not interpret that sense correctly. Ælfric also hints at a paradox underlying scriptural translation, for if the very grammatical structures used in biblical texts are also signifiers for certain, hidden meanings, the linguistic processes of analysis required for transforming a source into a target text could completely erase those connotations. However, those processes must take place if the translator's goal is to create a text that will be useful, i.e. relatively readable and understandable for a target audience with restricted knowledge of the source. Ælfric seems to want to have his cake and eat it too, insisting that the original word order must be maintained while also claiming "swa þæt þæt Englisc hæbbe his agene wisan" and this way must be allowed.

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<sup>82</sup> Wilcox, *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 118.



Admittedly, Æthelwold does not attempt to translate an entire book of the Bible, or even substantial passages, so his and Ælfric's situations are different in some obvious, fundamental ways. However, the *Rule of St. Benedict* often utilizes scriptural quotes, sometimes as support for particular doctrines and other times in the form of unattributed phrases that Benedict seamlessly interweaves into his prose. A good ecclesiastical leader and scholar like Æthelwold cannot simply ignore these quotes but neither is he always content to leave them as they appear in the original. It is rare that the bishop will leave out a biblical citation, although this does occur, for example, when he replaces Benedict's first chapter with his selection from Isidore's *De ecclesiasticis officiis*. More often, Æthelwold adapts the context of the scriptural quote to his own purposes and audience. These minor changes, substitutions, and expansions seem unified by an attempt on the bishop's part to provide his uneducated readers with all the information they might need to properly understand and interpret Benedict's more familiar usage of the Bible. A few examples will suffice to illustrate how Æthelwold is able to oscillate between a domesticating methodology and a loyalist treatment of scripture itself.

By far the most quoted biblical material in the *Rule* are the Psalms, and this is a trend that applies to all of Anglo-Saxon literature. Out of one-hundred and eighty-three references to scripture in Benedict's original, fully sixty-five are from Psalms. Initiates were required to study and memorize the Psalms above all other books—in Chapter 8, *De officiis divinis in noctibus*, "The Divine Office at Night," Benedict advises continuous study of the psalter whenever time permits: "Quod

vero restat post vigilias a fratribus qui psalterii vel lectionum aliquid indigent meditationi inserviat” [The time that remains after Vigils should be spent in meditation by those brothers who still need to memorize some part of the psalter or readings]. When explaining the use and singing of Psalms in Chapter 9, Æthelwold expands on Benedict’s original instructions, including Latin incipits instead of Old English equivalents. Compare:

Hiemis tempore suprascripto in promis versu tertio dicendum:  
Domine, labia mea aperies, et os meum adnuntiabit laudem tuam.  
Cui subiungendus est tertius psalmus et Gloria. Post hunc, psalmum nonagesimum quartum cum antiphona, aut certe decantandum. Inde sequatur ambrosianum, deinde sex psalmi cum antiphonas.

In winter time the aforementioned [Vigil] begins with this verse, repeated three times: O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall announce your praise. Then comes Psalm Three with a “Glory Be”; then Psalm Ninety-four with a refrain, or at least chanted. After that follows an Ambrosian hymn, then six psalms with refrains.

Now here is Æthelwold’s rendering:

On wintres timan is se uhtsang þus to beginnennen; cweþe ærest þis  
fers: “Deus in auditorium meum intende”; þonne syððan þriwa:  
“Domine quid multiplicati sunt”; þonne inuitatorium mid þæm  
sealme: “Venite exultemus domino”; æfter þysim is ymen to

singenne, þe to þære tide belimpð; æfter þæm syx sealmas mid þrim antefenum.

In winter time the Vigil is to begin thus; sing first this verse, "God, come to my assistance"; then, next, (sing) three times, "Lord why are they multiplied?"; then (sing) the invitatory with this psalm: "Come, let us exult in the Lord"; after this the hymn to sing is that which belongs to this time; after that, (sing) six psalms with three antiphones.

Clearly the bishop made his translation choices in order to present very detailed instructions to new initiates who may not be as familiar with the psalms referenced by Benedict. Yet he also adds Latin lines not present in the original *Rule*, stressing the importance of learning the prestige, perhaps, but also illustrating a type of code-switching that is relatively common in this period of Old English writing. This same tactic is at work as well in Chapter 12, "How the Solemn Office of Lauds is to be Celebrated."

Besides minor substitutions or additions like these cases, the bishop adopts one of two methods when quoting scripture. The first occurs only in Chapters 13 and 58 and involves including the Latin and its Old English rendering. At Chapter 13, "How Lauds are Celebrated on Ordinary Weekdays," Æthelwold adds the first lines of psalms to the numbers provided in the original, again helping uneducated monks and nuns get acquainted with the system. He also gives the first line of the Apostles Creed in Latin and then in Old English: "'Dimitte nobis debita nostra,

sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus,' þæt is on ure geþeode: Drihten forgif us ure synna, swa swa we forgifað þam, þe wið us gyltað" [God forgive us our sins, just as we forgive those who trespass against us]. At Chapter 58, "The Discipline of Receiving Brothers," the bishop is explaining the reception ceremony for new initiates. Obviously these are especially significant recitations and Æthelwold's apparatus provides uneducated readers with all they need to understand the scripture and ceremony. Thus, he writes "'Suscipe me, Domine, secundum eloquium tuum, et uiuam, et non confundas me ab expectation mea,' þæt is on ure geþeode: 'Drihten, onfoh min æfter þinum behate, and ic libbe, and ne gescend þu me on minre anbidunge'." [Uphold me, Lord, according to your word and I shall live; let not my hope be put to shame] (Psalm 119: 116). Æthelwold's most common strategy, however, is simply to translate Benedict's biblical quotations and references into Old English – in these cases, readers must accept that the bishop's renderings are accurate. This occurs, for example, in Chapter 27, where Benedict quotes Ezekiel 34: 10, 4-6: "Quod crissum videbatis assumebatis et quod debile erat proiciebatis" [What you saw to be fat you took for yourselves, and what was injured you cast away]. Æthelwold writes, "Þæt ge fættas gesawan, þæt ge gecuran, and þæt wanhal wæs and alewed, þæt ge awurpan" [What you saw as fat, that you selected, and what was weak and enfeebled, that you cast away]. His translation establishes a more punctuated rhythm, using the relative pronoun "þæt," and even contains a doublet, "wanhal wæs and alewed" for "debile."

Whether this is proper or not, it clearly shows the confidence Æthelwold has in his program and renderings: compare his strategy with Ælfric's in *Catholic Homilies*, where the abbot often includes Latin lines of New Testament scripture, despite the accompanying orthodox exegetical passages that should serve as insulation enough from any potential misunderstandings. Overall, Æthelwold *does* choose to translate scripture rather literally but he does not bother to make a show about it. This presumption of authority sets him apart from his fellow vernacular writers.

## **M. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown how Æthelwold's translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict* is a turning point of sorts in the history of Old English translation. More knowledgeable than Alfred and less tentative than Ælfric, the bishop of Winchester infused the most important document of the Benedictine reform with a very personal type of linguistic and rhetorical energy. He appealed to Bede for both ideology and clarity but it is Aldhelm who influences Æthelwold's writing style the most. Thus his translation exhibits extreme *differentia* and lexical variation, rhetorical flourishes and ornamentation not present in the original, as well as evidence of the displacement of Benedict's original ideas in favor of the reformer's own agendas.

Other Old English translators may just be paying lip service to tradition and precedent when they announce their anxieties, but Æthelwold doesn't bother to even feign fear: any language that brings someone closer to God is the right

language as far as he is concerned. This sentiment will get picked up by later Church reformers such as Wycliff and Luther. While Æthelwold's aim of making the *Rule* more appropriate and intelligible to his audience ostensibly supersedes desires for stylistic elegance or fidelity, he is still able to transform Latin Christian culture's most personal and aesthetic monastic manual into a fluid, idiomatic testament to the potential of Old English language. In some sense, then, Ælfric's almost panicked defenses of his own translations are a bit of a step back. For these reasons and many more, Æthelwold deserves more attention as an innovative translator.

## Chapter 3: Ælfric's Evolving Translatology, from Genesis to Esther

### A. Introduction

The defining feature of Ælfric's translation practice is its bifurcation into two very distinct modes of interpretation. The first mode is the literal strategy defended in his *Prefatio* to Genesis and displayed in the first book of the Heptateuch. The second strategy is used by the abbot for homilies and translating all other books of the Bible except for Genesis. This mode is freer and often dubbed "paraphrase" because of how far the target translation roams from its source. Ælfric's word-for-word rendering of Genesis is one of the most conservative translations of scripture in the Anglo-Saxon corpus and seems to be part of Jerome's legacy of translation, initiated by his *Letter to Pammachius* in defense of his own Vulgate project. However, in every other translation, the schoolman chooses instead a translation methodology that many contemporary scholars identify as sense for sense. What is the reason for his changing methodologies? Ælfric's source texts in all of these instances are scripture, so this is not a case of biblical versus non-biblical translation. Is he merely adopting – or, given his formal training and superior literary skills, improving – Alfred's model of translation, which self-admittedly was "hwilum word be worde hwilum andgit of andgiete" [sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense]? However, the medieval period, king of Wessex included, inherited this oscillating scale of methods from Jerome and Augustine who got many of their doctrines in turn

from the Roman orator Cicero: is the abbot reaching further into the past to return to an abandoned hermeneutical habit? Or is Ælfric, like his mentor Æpelwold, so emboldened by knowledge, skill, and ecclesiastical commitment that he can justify all manner of omission and addition in the name of spreading Truth to the masses?

While Ælfric's practice and theory shows signs of influence from patristic orthodoxy and more recent developments in England, he is a singular figure standing steward over the last intellectual flourishing of Old English. Unlike Alfred, the abbot is a learned and venerable church scholar whose audience extends into both the laity and the Benedictine community: Ælfric holds his work to different standards than the king and does not write from a position of political power. Alfred possesses both the royal prerogative and the confidence of a well-meaning amateur, neither of which Ælfric can claim in defense of his many manipulations of source materials. For all of his professional life, Ælfric is an official of the Church and with powerful patrons like Æpelmaer and Æpelwold and he must maintain a balance between doctrine and didacticism. Just as fundamentally, Ælfric's views of authorship have been cultivated by the Latin doctrine of *auctoritas* and he is aware of his place in the hierarchy. His various writings make clear that the abbot saw himself as simply another link in a long chain of intellectual custodians that stretches back beyond antiquity and to the



very writers and characters of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> In Genesis, Ælfric attempted his only extended enterprise into word-for-word translation but even when he limits his interpretive activity to the narrative events, the abbot is forced to make decisions that create a target text with many differences from its source. Later in life — Genesis is considered one of the scholar's earliest translations — Ælfric abandons this Hieronymonian method and adopts instead a translation practice and theory that both fears audience misinterpretation less and invests Ælfric himself with more textual and spiritual authority. Translation transforms from a glorified form of glossing into an exercise in commentary and translation. Unlike Alfred, however, Ælfric is backed by a lifetime of scholarly endeavours and thus his hermeneutic asides are expertly interwoven into the very structure and content of his post-Genesis translations.

That the long-standing tradition of Old Testament translation in Anglo-Saxon England has consistently been marginalized by biblical scholars is one of the clearest signs of a need for more contemporary defenses of vernacular translation. Several key studies of biblical translations, still used and cited by academics, leave Ælfric's contributions out completely. This is the case, for example, in Bruce Metzger's *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*, where the only pre-Wycliffite translations that rate any coverage are the

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Hill characterizes Ælfric as "participating in a 'chain of authority' ... as patristic writers had done before," in her chapter "Translating the Tradition" in *A Companion to Ælfric*, eds. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001), 62.

interlinear glosses of the Lindisfarne Gospels.<sup>2</sup> I am quite honestly baffled by the giant lacunae in Metzger's timeline, which omits all of Ælfric's translations, the well-known West Saxon Gospels, and the anonymous Old English Heptateuch. Beryl Smalley betrays a similarly dismissive attitude toward Old English contributions to biblical translation when she labels the entire period "a dramatic pause."<sup>3</sup>

In the first half of this chapter, I will examine Ælfric's translation of Genesis as well as its accompanying manifesto, its *Prefatio*. In the second half, I shift my analysis to the abbot's later translation of Esther and insights in the *Libellus de ueteri testamento et nouo* as evidence of Ælfric's maturation over time. According to Peter Clemoes, Ælfric translated Genesis and wrote its *Prefatio* between 992-1002 – Esther was likely translated between 1002-1005, and the *Libellus* was written 1005-1006. The evidence for dating Genesis and the *Libellus* far outweighs the available proof for an exact chronological placement of Esther.<sup>4</sup> These works could be separated by as few as one year or as many as thirteen, if we use Clemoes' timeline. Most scholars agree, however, that Genesis comes very early in the abbot's career and Esther was translated near the end of his life. The striking differences between the two indicate the

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford UP, 1952; reprinted 1983), 44.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed chronology of Ælfric's life and works, see Peter Clemoes, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works," *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul Szarmach and Deborah Oosterhouse (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 56-57.

likelihood of a significant chronological distance and in the following sections I will show evidence of this.

## **B. Background Information on Old English Heptateuch<sup>5</sup>**

The Old English translations of the biblical Heptateuch have not been passed down in a single manuscript, and neither can all the fragments be traced back unequivocally to Ælfric. This fractured transmission has provided scholars with no shortage of obstacles, especially when pursuing questions about authorship, provenance, and contextual circumstances surrounding the production of scriptural translations. There are, however, three manuscripts that contain significant portions of Genesis. The most complete extant manuscript is Bodleian MS Laud 509 (L), containing Genesis through Judges, Ælfric's *Prefatio* to Genesis, his Treatise on the Old and New Testament, and his letter to Wulfgeat of Ylmandune. However, the most studied Heptateuch manuscript is British Library MS Cotton Claudius B. iv (B), known as the Illustrated Old English Hexateuch because it contains 394 color pictures that relate to the biblical text, although the nature and exact purpose of this relationship is a topic of ongoing study. Produced at Canterbury and dated to the eleventh century, this manuscript contains translations of the first six books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. It has also received a relatively recent book-length treatment by Benjamin C. Withers that focuses on the links

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<sup>5</sup> This collection of translations is sometimes known as the Hexateuch, depending on which manuscript is being referred to. S.J. Crawford and Richard Marsden, the two acknowledged authorities on this corpus, prefer Heptateuch and I have those chosen to retain their title.

between the visual and textual elements of the text.<sup>6</sup> The other extant manuscripts contain mere fragments in comparison to what has been preserved in these primary codices. Cambridge University Library MS. I i. l. 33 (C) contains Ælfric's *Prefatio* and Genesis 1-24:26, but some of the translated portions differ from the versions in L and B.<sup>7</sup>

The abbot of Eynsham references another translator at work on Genesis in his famous *Prefatio*, when he explains that he “ne þorfte na mare awendan þære bec buton to Isaace, Abrahames suna, for þam þe sum oðer man þe hæfde awend fram Isaace þa boc oð ende” [need not translate any more of the book except up to Isaac, the son of Abraham, because some other man had translated the book from Isaac until the end].<sup>8</sup> There is no indication elsewhere as to the identity of this other translator employed by Ælfric's patron, Ealdorman Æþelward. The presence of a preface in Ælfric's name has encouraged a tradition of attributing the bulk of the translated materials to the Benedictine writer but this is not accurate. Current evidence holds Ælfric responsible for Genesis 1-24:22, Numbers 13 through to the end, except for a couple phrases at 13:4 and 13:5-17, all of Joshua except for 1:1-10

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<sup>6</sup> *The Illustrated Old English Hexateuch, Cotton Ms. Claudius B.iv: The Frontier of Seeing and Reading in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Marsden explains that it is likely the C version is a “witness to the precursor of half of LB's Genesis text” since in at least three protracted sections C's translation is closer to the Vulgate (*The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo*, lxxii).

<sup>8</sup> I follow Marsden's Old English edition of Genesis and the *Prefatio* in *The Old English Heptateuch and Ælfric's Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008). Translations are my own.

and 13, and the entirety of Judges.<sup>9</sup> Ælfric is the foremost writer in Anglo-Saxon England, the direct inheritor of Æpelwold's translation legacy, and his scriptural translations are widely studied. However, Marsden's comment that the text of Genesis is "the most neglected part of the Ælfrician corpus" remains true even after fifteen years.<sup>10</sup> One reason for this dearth is Ælfric's ultra-conservative style of translation: there are relatively few significant differences between the source and the target text, especially when compared to the corpus of Anglo-Saxon England's other prolific translator, Alfred. Even fewer of those extended studies of the translation move beyond the philological level. Considering Genesis in isolation from the rest of Ælfric's translated oeuvre restricts what can be learned about the arc and evolution of the abbot's exegetical concerns. To avoid this mistake, after analyzing some of those concerns in Genesis I will then examine his late rendering of Esther to provide a more complete understanding of Ælfric's hermeneutic legacy.

### C. Genesis A and Genesis B in Junius XI

The most studied translation of Genesis from Anglo-Saxon England is not Ælfric's but rather two anonymous metrical renderings. As such, to better grasp both the originality and conservatism of the abbot's translation, and to link it to its larger literary and culture contexts, it is necessary to compare his results to this

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<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed overview of how scholars have decided on these attributions for Ælfric, see Peter Clemoes, "The Composition of the Old English Text," in *Illustrated Hexateuch. British Museum Cotton Claudius B. IV*, eds. C. R. Dodwell and P. Clemoes, EEMF 18 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1974), 42-53.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Marsden, "Ælfric as Translator: The Old English Prose *Genesis*," in *Anglia* 109, (1991), 319.

other popular translation. *Genesis A* and *B*, as these metrical translations are known, are found in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Junius XI. This important codex of Old English verse, once referred to as the Cædmon Manuscript, also contains Exodus, Daniel, and *Christ and Satan*. Scholars have traced the codex's production to sometime between 950 and 1050 CE, making it roughly contemporaneous with the other primary Old English poetic records, the Exeter Book, the Vercelli Book, and the Nowell Codex. Dating the individual poems is an on-going endeavor but it is generally thought that while *Genesis A* might have been started slightly earlier than 900, strong evidence for dating *Genesis B* from 900 suggests more work on *Genesis A*, at least in the form of revisions, likely occurred at the same time.<sup>11</sup>

While theories concerning authorship, audience, and usage abound, contemporary consensus holds that multiple translators were involved, possibly even a different writer for each poem, yet the identities of all are unknown. Early authorities linked these biblical translations with the divinely-inspired cowherd Cædmon, since his alliterative poems in the vernacular, as reported by Bede in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, deal with topics that closely resemble those in the poems copied into Junius 11.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See A. N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin UP, 1978), 36-37.

<sup>12</sup> Bede writes of Cædmon at IV.24: "Song he ærest be middangeardes gesceape ond bi fruman moncynnes ond eal þæt stær genesis (þæt is seo æreste Moyses booc), ond eft bi utgonge Israhela folces of Ægypta londe ond bi ingonge þæs gehatlandes, ond bi oðrum monegum spellum þæs halgan gewrites canones boca, ond bi Cristes menniscnesse ond bi his þrowunge ond bi his upastignesse in heofonas, ond bi þæs Halgan Gastes cyme ond þara apostola lare, ond eft bi þæm dæge þæs toweardan domes ond bi fyrhtu þæs tintreglican wiites, ond bi swetnesse þæs heofonlecan rices he monig leoð geworhte. Ond swelce eac oðer monig be þæm godcundan fremsumnessum ond domum he geworhte" [He sang first about the creation of the world and

In 2946 lines, *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* detail events from the Creation to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, roughly Genesis 22:13. Rarely translating holy writ in a literal manner, instead the poet-translators prefer to describe the events of the first book of the Bible with the metrical tools and wordhoard usually reserved for heroic poetry. Lines 235-851 differ from the rest of the poem, mostly in terms of metrical and linguistic features, and in 1894 it was conclusively determined to be a translated section of an Old Saxon version of Genesis.<sup>13</sup> According to Doane, *Genesis B* was likely interpolated into *Genesis A* in the late ninth or early tenth century due to lacunae, since the latter version omits details about the Fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise.<sup>14</sup>

Caedmon's immensely popular verse poems, if we agree with Bede, helped introduce a literary and culture tradition of mingling the spiritual and

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about the origin of mankind and all of the history of Genesis--that is the first book of Moses--, and afterwards about the exodus of the Israeli people from the land of Egypt and their entry into the promised land; and about many other stories of the holy writ of the books of the canon; and about Christ's incarnation, and about his suffering and about his ascension into the heavens; and about the coming of the Holy Ghost, and of the lore of the apostles; and after about the day of impending judgement, and about the terror of the torturing punishment, and about the sweetness of the heavenly kingdom, he wrought many songs. And so also many others he made about divine mercy and judgement]. Old English and translation are from Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B Mynors, eds, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: OUP, 1969). Caedmon's authorship is no longer credited, and while paleographical evidence suggests the Junius translations were copied from a single exemplar, other linguistic and poetic variances indicate multiple translators were at work.

<sup>13</sup> See A.N. Doane, *The Saxon Genesis* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin UP, 1991), 232-52.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that there is an unusual lack of continuity between the two texts. Linguistically, the Old English translation of the Old Saxon Genesis retains several idiomatic features that are not found elsewhere in Old English; furthermore, while *Genesis A* evinces late West Saxon linguistic preferences, *Genesis B* is distinctly closer to Early West Saxon. *Genesis B* is also far less faithful to its source text than *Genesis A*, taking a surprising amount of creative license in rendering the Fall, especially in its portrayal of Satan. It has been noted by many scholars that Milton's Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* bears an uncanny resemblance to the fallen angel in *Genesis B*: both are masters of rhetoric and are positioned as agents of vengeance rather than evil.

the heroic, and while the father of Old English poetry is no longer considered the author of any of the Junius XI texts, *Genesis A* clearly stands in the same line of tradition. Many scholars have argued, however, that despite extensive reliance on Germanic poetic tradition, the translator of *Genesis A* produced both a translation and a poem that are below the normal standards of either in the Anglo-Saxon period. The progenitor of this critical perspective is W.P. Ker, who wrote that *Genesis A* was “mere flat commonplace, interesting as giving the average literary taste and the commonplace poetical stock of a dull educated man.”<sup>15</sup> Orchard reports the “basic unfairness of such a description” and references Doane, the recognized expert on *Genesis A* and *B*. Against detractors, Doane argues that a “careful comparison of the text of *Genesis A* with that of the Vulgate reveals that the poet has systematically, virtually phrase by phrase, reproduced in traditional poetry the essential meaning of the Latin Genesis which he had before him when he worked.”<sup>16</sup> Doane’s own work relies on and usefully departs from Bernard Huppé’s incredibly influential essay on *Genesis A* in *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine’s Influence on Old English Poetry*, where he asserts the poem’s value as an important entry in the history of imaginative literary expansions of scriptural symbolism.<sup>17</sup> Huppé’s work

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<sup>15</sup> *The Dark Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 256.

<sup>16</sup> Doane (1978), 61. On page 68, Doane goes on to argue that “The omissions in *Genesis A*, far from suggesting careless or naïve work, evidence a skilled craftsman, responsive to the needs of his traditional poetic medium, but also highly aware of his responsibilities to an outside text and its attendant ‘learned’ traditions.”

<sup>17</sup> Here is a quote that highlights the thrust of Huppé’s arguments: “*Genesis A* has a theme wrested out of the very structure of Genesis, out of the patristic understanding of the basic prophetic



opened the poem up to a wider community of scholars who have done a great deal to expand current understandings of its spiritual and literary significances, but I have found no studies that undertake a comparative analysis of *Genesis A* with Ælfric's *Genesis*.<sup>18</sup>

#### D. Ælfric's Prefaces

No discussion of the prose *Genesis* is complete without an assessment of Ælfric's supplemental text, his *Prefatio*, addressed to his patron. The fact that the *Prefatio* survives in the three primary manuscripts that contain *Genesis* is a sign of its importance for readers and it has often been used as a touchstone for insights into Anglo-Saxon translation habits. However, readers must be careful not to assume that Ælfric's comments here are applicable to every translated text from his long career, as this particular text was written early and displays an obsessive anxiety about rendering scripture into the vernacular. This is a much riskier

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meaning of the first book of the Bible. In this sense, *Genesis A* stands at the beginning of the great medieval literature that, with the symbolic meaning of the Bible always at the center of consciousness, was to extend the imagination beyond the structural limitations of biblical commentary in such works of culmination as the *Divine Comedy* and *Piers Plowman*" (*Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry* [New York: SUNY UP, 1959], 209).

Acknowledging Huppé's importance, Doane writes "The flaws of his book are obvious, his influence undeniable: anyone now who writes on the Old English scriptural poetry at once criticizes his method and pays homage to his ideas" ([1978], 43).

<sup>18</sup> One problem a critic encounters immediately when undertaking a comparison of Ælfric's translation of *Genesis* with the metrical rendering of *Genesis A* is the mystery of their respective exemplars. We do not have a copy of the Vulgate from which Ælfric or the anonymous Junius translators were working, and so it is difficult to judge whether their choices are the result of personal interpretations or merely the carrying over of idiosyncrasies from the exemplar. However, Marsden points out "There is an apparent absurdity in trying to judge the fidelity of a translation to its exemplar-text when the translation itself provides the only access to that text. In practice, however, all surviving Vulgate manuscripts have the greater proportion of their text in common, if minor variations (many of them orthographical) are ignored. General assessments of a translation's accuracy and quality can therefore be made with some confidence" (*The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995], 406).

endeavor than, say, turning Augustine's *Soliloquiea* into Old English. And as the most respected English church figure of the Benedictine Reform, Ælfric cannot take the same sort of liberties when translating as those presumed by King Alfred the century before. Regardless of his station or authority, Ælfric also has access to a wealth of knowledge and a lifetime's experience of literary and exegetical skills that would not have been available to a secular ruler.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Ælfric is an acknowledged master of prose, in both Latin and Old English, whereas the king's capabilities are still held in doubt. Intimate familiarity with Latin and scriptural standards of rhetoric, style, and exegesis prove an asset for Ælfric when tackling the text of Genesis, allowing him to produce more fluent translations and navigate knotty issues of syntax and interpretation without recourse to the techniques favored by Alfred.

The most striking feature of Ælfric's *Prefatio* is his repeated assertions of his reluctance to undertake the task of biblical translation leveled on him by his patron. The anxieties surrounding acts of translation are myriad and well known: from "traduttore, traditore" to "lost in translation," the slipperiness that interferes between meaning and its textual forms has acquired nearly as many metaphors as translation itself. And if you choose to study Anglo-Saxon translation, you get used to writers broadcasting their concerns, usually in prefaces. Now, if readers take these translators at their word, being a vernacular translator in England was

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<sup>19</sup> Even if scholars assume that Alfred's circle of ecclesiastical helpers had a pivotal role in the king's translation projects, none of them produced as much biblical exegesis or commentary as Ælfric.

fraught with risks: writers such as Bede and Alfred argue in favor of translation, despite its dangers, as a means to resuscitating failing cultures of education. On the other side stands Ælfric, who loudly broadcasts his fear of misinterpretation in general and bible translation in particular. Traffic between the vernacular and the prestige was by no means a new phenomenon, but over time Old English increased in usage and status. Besides early renderings of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed, for which Bede advocated, the vernacular was entrusted with transmitting the wisdom of patristic fathers and, eventually, scripture itself. It is at this juncture that the most pointed expressions of anxiety appear because holy writ is the Word of God and therefore in some fundamental ways beyond the minds of men: thus, the fear is that any change is a sinful one.

Translation scholars have done some work to analyze these fears and even trace their forms in different languages and cultures. According to Lawrence Venuti, each act of translation is a "scandal" because "it occasions revelations that question the authority of dominant cultural values and institutions."<sup>20</sup> We can see this in Augustine's reaction to Jerome's Vulgate, which would dare to supplant the primacy of the Greek Septuagint by appealing to older, Hebrew sources. The bishop of Hippo, in a letter to Jerome, stated, "I do not wish your translation from the Hebrew to be read in churches, for fear of upsetting the flock of Christ with a great scandal, by publishing something new, something seemingly contrary to the authority of the Septuagint, which version their ears and hearts are accustomed to

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<sup>20</sup> *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

hear, and which was accepted even by the Apostles.”<sup>21</sup> Like the fear expressed by Ælfric in his *Prefatio* to Genesis, and in other texts through out his lifetime, Augustine’s worry is focused on danger of unlearned readers misinterpreting the translations. The return to the Hebrew earned Jerome no little scorn and even some accusations of heresy. Douglas Robinson takes a slightly different viewpoint than Venuti’s, following Sigmund Freud, and argues that translation is a taboo, “a collectivized anxiety about sacred texts that has survived massive demystificatory assaults and has generated through the centuries an astonishing variety of avoidance behaviors.”<sup>22</sup> Unlike many translation historians who are quick to shove Anglo-Saxon writers under the “Dark Ages” rug, Robinson sees Ælfric ultimately as an initiator of a “rationalist demystification of the ancient taboos.”<sup>23</sup>

This assessment is fair: despite Ælfric’s protestations, the abbot *does* translate part of Genesis and he *is not* always literal. In this the churchman is following Jerome, patron saint of translators. It is a commonplace that sense-for-sense translation was considered more efficacious for all texts except scripture: Jerome is recognized as the patristic progenitor for this doctrine, and he declares that in the Bible “verborum ordo mysterium est” [the very order of the words is a mystery” and thus deserving of a word-for-word approach to preserve the kernel

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<sup>21</sup> Wilfrid Parsons, trans., *Saint Augustine: Letters*, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1956), 419.

<sup>22</sup> *Translation & Taboo* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1996), xvi.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

of divine truth.<sup>24</sup> However, Jerome only advocates literalism in his *Letter to Pammachius*, where he defends himself from accusations of liberality: overall he is a paradoxical champion for sense-for-sense, like his main influence, Cicero. As much as translation scholars like to offer Jerome as spokesperson for word-for-word translation, he is just as quick as others to promise one method and practice another. Perhaps it is from Jerome's example that Anglo-Saxon translators learned to bluff so well.

First and foremost, Ælfric was a teacher – he was sent to the monastery at Cernel to educate the monks there and many of his writings grew organically out of his pedagogical program. Ælfric's preface to his first series of *Sermones catholici* can be read as an extension of this role – the abbot has anxieties about translating but those fears are outweighed by God's decrees to teach. Ælfric uses extensive biblical quotations in his homilies but these are contextually appropriate and explained in a manner that is dogmatic, so his anxiety concerning these examples is not as pointed as for his translation of Genesis. However, he still voices his concerns in the Latin preface to the first series:

Licet temere vel presumptuose, tamen transtulimus hunc codicem ex  
libris Latinorum, scilicet Sancte Scripture, in nostram consuetam  
sermocinationem, ob edificationem simplicium, qui hanc norunt  
tantummodo locutionem, sive legendo sive audiendo; ideoque nec

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted from *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, trans. Kathleen Davis, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 23. The Latin edition is Jerome, *Epistulae*, ed. I. Hilberg, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 503.

obscura posuimus verba, sed simplicem Anglicam, quo facilius possit ad cor pervenire legentium vel audientium ad utilitatem animarum suarum, quia alia lingua nesciunt erudiri quam in qua nati sunt. Nee ubique transtulimus verbum ex verbo, sed sensum ex sensu; cavendo tamen diligentissime deceptivos errores, ne inveniremur aliqua heresi seducti seu fallacia fuscati.<sup>25</sup>

Even if rashly or presumptuously, we have, nevertheless, translated this book from Latin works, namely from Holy Scripture, into the language to which we are accustomed for the edification of the simple who know only this language, either through reading or hearing it read; and for that reason we could not use obscure words, just plain English, by which it may more easily reach to the heart of the readers or listeners to the benefit of their souls, because they are unable to be instructed in a language other than the one to which they were born. We have not translated word for word throughout but in accordance with the sense; guarding, nevertheless, most diligently against deceptive errors so that we might not be found to have been led astray by any heresy or darkened by fallacy.<sup>26</sup>

“Rashly” refers to what Robinson calls “taboo,” an apparent admittance of potential wrong-doing; and “presumptuously” shows that Ælfric is not certain if

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<sup>25</sup> *Ælfric's Prefaces*, ed. Jonathon Wilcox (Durham, England: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994), 107.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

someone in his position should be entrusted with the potentially heretical act of translation. Like Alfred and Æþelwold, Ælfric translates for the sake of knowledge, and the rest of his preface clearly explains that his greatest fear is for the souls of men in the coming end of days.

Ælfric's Old English preface to this same series of homilies outlines other translation concerns. His opening paragraph presents didactic cause as well as the authority he wields to translate:

Pa bearn me on mode, ic truwiged ðurh Godes gife, þæt ic ðas boc of Ledenum gereorde to Engliscre spræce awende, na þurh gebylde micelre lare, ac for ðan ðe ic geseah and gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum, ðe ungelærede menn ðurh heora bilewitnysse to micclum wisdom tealdon; and me ofhreow þæt hi ne cuðon ne næfdon ða godspellican lare on heora gewritum, buton ðam mannum anum ðe þæt Leden cuðon, and buton þam bocum ðe Ælfric cyning snoterlice awende of Ledene on Englisc, ða synd to hæbbenne.<sup>27</sup>

Then it occurred to my mind, I trust through God's grace, that I would turn this book from the Latin language into the English tongue; not from confidence of great learning, but because I have seen and heard of much error in many English books, which unlearned men, through their simplicity, have esteemed as great

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 108.

wisdom: and I regretted that they knew not nor had not the evangelical doctrines among their writings, those men only excepted who knew Latin, and those books excepted which king Alfred wisely turned from Latin into English, which are to be had.<sup>28</sup>

Even if he is violating a taboo and going outside the bounds of his station because he has “geseah and gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum,” Ælfric feels it is his spiritual duty to translate, and his educational agenda is a holy task, like Alfred’s translation enterprise. The abbot claims: “For þisum antimbre ic gedyrstlæhte, on Gode truwende, þæt ic ðas gesetnysse undergann, and eac forðam þe menn behofiað godre lare swiðost on þisum timan þe is geendung þyssere worulde” [For this cause I presumed, trusting in God, to undertake this task, and also because men have need of good instruction, especially at this time, which is the ending of this world].<sup>29</sup>

Ælfric even quotes the Bible as a defense against the taboo that normally surrounds religious translation acts:

Se ylca Drihten clypode þurh his witegan Ezechiel: “Gif ðu ne gestentst þone unrihtwisan and hine ne manast þæt he fram his arleasnysse gecyrre and lybbe, þonne swelt se arleasa on his unrihtwisnysse and ic wille ofgan æt ðe his blod”... “Gif ðu ðonne þone arleasan gewarnast and he nele fram his arleasnysse gecyrran,

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<sup>28</sup> All translations of the preface to the first series of homilies are based on Benjamin Thorpe’s rendering in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church* (London: Richard and John E. Taylor, 1844).

<sup>29</sup> Wilcox, 108.



þu alysdest þine sawle mid þære mynegunge, and se arleasa swylt on his unrihtwisnyse.”<sup>30</sup>

The Lord also cried, through his prophet Ezechiel, “If thou warnest not the unrighteous, and exhortest him not, so that he turn from his wickedness and live, then shall the wicked die in his iniquity, and I will require from thee his blood” ... “But if thou warnest the wicked, and he will not turn from his wickedness, thou shalt release thy soul with that admonition, and the wicked shall die in his unrighteousness.”

Ælfric can violate the long-standing restrictions on translation because he ultimately feels these restrictions compete with other doctrines, passed down directly from God’s mouth as it were. And if a reader makes the wrong interpretive turn, well then, the abbot’s intentions are pure so that mistake rests on the reader’s shoulders:

For swylcum bebodum wearð me geðuht þæt ic nære unscyldig wið God, gif ic nolde oðrum mannum cyðan, oððe þurh tungan oððe þurh gewritu, þa godspellican soþfæstnyse þe he sylf gecwæð, and eft halgum lareowum onwreah. For wel fela ic wat on þisum earde gelæredran þonne ic sy, ac God geswutelað his wundra þurh ðone þe he wile.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wilcox, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 110.

From such commands it appeared to me that I should not be  
guiltless before God, if I would not declare to other men, by tongue  
or by writings, the evangelical truth, which he himself spake, and  
afterwards to holy teachers revealed. Very many I know in this  
country more learned than I am, but God manifests his wonders  
through whom he will.

Ælfric sees himself as an instrument of divinity, like the inspired translators of the  
Septuagint. By committing himself fully to his evangelical teaching, he surrenders  
his role as translator to the will of God. This is in itself also a risky claim, and it  
does not give the Anglo-Saxon scholar *carte blanche*. However, he is again in  
patristic company with this claim to divine assent, for Augustine asserts the  
biblical translator's prerogative in *De Civitate Dei*, Book 18, Chapter 43:

For the very same Spirit that was in the prophets when they uttered  
their messages was at work also in the seventy scholars when they  
translated them. And the Spirit could have said something else as  
well, with divine authority, as if the prophet had said both things,  
because it was the same Spirit that said both. The Spirit could also  
have said the same thing in a different way, so that even though the  
words were not the same, the same meaning would still shine  
through to those who properly understood them. He could also have  
omitted something, or added something, so that it might be shown  
in this way too that the task of translation was achieved not by the

servile labour of a human bond-servant of words, but by the power of God which filled and directed the mind of the translator.<sup>32</sup>

With God's Will directing the translator's quill, it is impossible for the translator to err, as long as the translator does nothing to cloud or deviate from that divine lead. By asserting that he is not worthy, the abbot is implying that that very admission of humility is what makes him qualified to translate in God's name.

In the *Prefatio* to Genesis, Ælfric records his most fear-laden comments on translation, seeming to backpeddle from his earlier position in the *Sermones catholici*. Although he has agreed to the demands of his patron Æpelweard, the abbot is relieved to only have to translate the first half, the latter having already been completed by a different scribe. He also declares his intentions about future projects, warning his patron of his restrictions:

Ic cweþe nu þæt ic ne dearr ne ic nelle nane boc æfter þissere of  
Ledene on English awendan, and ic bidde þe, leof ealdorman, þæt  
þu me þæs na leng ne bidde, þi læs þe ic beo þe ungehirsum oþþe  
leas gif ic do.<sup>33</sup>

I say now that I dare not, nor do I desire, to translate any book after  
this from Latin into English, and I bid you, dear ealdorman, that you  
no longer bid me this, in case I might be disobedient to you, or false  
if I do.

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<sup>32</sup> *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 821.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. Translations of quotations from the *Prefatio* are my own.

Here is an example of anxiety as an almost instinctual response that is not supported by actions: Ælfric would go on to translate parts of Numbers, Joshua, Judges, and many other books and passages. This paradoxical statement aligns the preface with the Jerome's *Letter to Pammachius*, which Robinson too-unkindly characterizes as part of a genre of "wild, shaggy letters aflame with the passionate tempers and animal fears of their writers, documents that have been more quoted than read precisely because they are so embarrassingly unkempt and uncouth."<sup>34</sup> To appreciate Ælfric's apprehensions and the style of translation he adopts to mitigate his fears, it is necessary to close-read several passages in the *Prefatio* before condemning them as merely the result of "passionate tempers and animal fears."

In the very first passage of the missive, the abbot bares the heart of his concern, a mirroring of Augustine's admonishment of Jerome:

Nu þincð me, leof, þæt þæt weorc is swiðe pleolic me oððe  
 ænigum men to underbeginne, for þan þe ic ondræde, gif sum  
 dysig man þas boc ræt oððe rædan gehyrð, þæt he wille wenan  
 þæt he mote lybban nu on þære niwan æ swa swa men leofodon  
 under Moyses æ.<sup>35</sup>

Now it seems to me, dear, that that work is extremely perilous for  
 me or any man to undertake, because I fear if some foolish person

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<sup>34</sup> Douglas Robinson, "The Ascetic Foundations of Western Translatology: Jerome and Augustine," *Translation and Literature* 1 (1992), 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

this book reads or hears it read that he will think that he may live now in the new law just as the patriarchs lived then in that time before the old law was appointed, or just as men lived under the law of Moses.

Ælfric's worry is not, primarily, for translating but for reading. He fears for the "dysig man" who lacks enough basic knowledge of scripture to understand the typological links that translate the events and morals of the Old Testament into the world after the incarnation of Christ. The implication here is that the abbot *does* possess the requisite knowledge and skill, along with divine permission, for every attempt to translate God's Word is dependent on God granting inspiration. It is "pleolic" to translate Genesis because of the massive potential for misinterpretation, no matter how carefully or faithfully Ælfric renders the original text in the vernacular.

The abbot continues and expands on the faults of lay clerics who are out of their spiritual depths when attempting to explicate scripture for their congregations:

Ʒa ungelæredan preostas, gif hi hwæt litles understandað of þam Lydenbocum, þonne þincð him sona þæt hi magon mære lareowas beon; ac hi ne cunnon swa þeah þæt gastlice andgit þær to, and hu seo ealde æ wæs getacnung toweardra þinga oððe hu seo niwe gecyðnis æfter Cristes menniscnisse wæs gefillednys ealra þæra

þinga, þe seo ealde gecyðnis getacnode towearde be Criste and be  
hys gecorenum.<sup>36</sup>

Unlearned priests, if they some little part understand of Latin books, then it seems immediately to them that they may be great teachers; but nevertheless they do not know the spiritual meaning of it, and how the old law was symbolic of things to come, or how the new testament after Christ's incarnation was the fulfillment of all those things the old testament signified in advance concerning Christ and his Chosen ones.

Where "ungelæredan preostas" encounter the "gastlice andgit," they are not equipped to identify and properly contextualize the "getacnode" language that is at work. Grasping the spiritual meaning of scripture is the purpose of the all-important practice of *lectio divina*, which was at the core of the *Rule of St.*

*Benedict* and possibly a factor in Bishop Æpelwold's hermeneutic practices.

While the monastic orders required a large amount of private rumination on scripture, the secular clergy was not trained as rigorously, despite the fact that they were the branch of the Church entrusted with the education the laity.

Near the end of his life, Bede was similarly aware of this deplorable state of the clergy, and in his epistle to Bishop Egbert, he repeatedly urges the ecclesiast to consider his own duty as a teacher and to aid in the training of

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 117.

more clergy to spread the Word:<sup>37</sup> “Neutra enim haec virtus sine altera rite potest impleri: si aut is qui bene vivit docendi officium negligit, aut recte docens antistes rectam exercere operationem contemnit” [For neither of these virtues may duly be fulfilled apart from the other: if either the man of good life neglect the office of teacher, or the bishop which teacheth rightly despise the practice of good works]. Bede insists that teaching is a central tenant without which a person of God is failing in his duties. He looks to the apostles as the example, for they “verbum Dei praedicare, et per omnia disseminare curabant” [endeavoured to preach and spread abroad everywhere the word of God]. After acknowledging that the bishop’s responsibilities and domains are too vast to allow Egbert to personally preach in every village, Bede advises him to proceed by “presbyteros videlicet ordinando, atque instituendo doctors” [ordaining priests and appointing teachers]. Bede then makes one of his few statements on the value of vernacular translation for Church-related texts, specifically the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, imploring Egbert to “sed idiotas, hoc est, eos qui propriae tantum linguae notitiam habent, haec ipsa sua lingua discere, ac sedulo decantare facito” [cause them to be known and constantly repeated in their own tongue by those that are unlearned, that is, by them who have knowledge only of their own tongue]. In order for the laity to receive instruction in the “fidem catholicam,” they need to have the Latin versions interpreted and translated into Old English by

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<sup>37</sup> All translations of Bede’s Letter are from *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. Judith McClure and Roger Collins, trans. Roger Collins (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 343-57. The Latin quotations are from *Ecclesiastical History*, Volume II, trans. J.E. King (Boston: Harvard UP, 1930), 446-60.

educated clergy. However, there is a lack of properly trained preachers, according to Bede: “Quod non solum de laicis, id est, in populari adhuc vita constitutes, verum etiam de clericis sive monachis qui Latinae sunt linguae expertes fieri oportet” [And this should be done, not only as touching the laity, that is to say, them which are still established in the life of the world, but also as touching the clergy or monks which are ignorant of the Latin tongue]. Despite all the difficulty, and cost, of educating so many people, and the risk that translation and interpretation always incur, Bede declares it a necessity, “Sic enim fit, ut coetus omnis fidelium quomodo fidelis esse” [(f)or by this means it cometh to pass that the whole body of believers shall learn how they should believe]. Learning and repeating the essentials of “fidem catholicam” is how the laity practice their belief and express their faith, and if they could do this in their own tongue, they would then be possessed of a stronger belief.

Bede himself used Old English versions of the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. He writes, “...ipse multis saepe sacerdotibus idiotis haec utraque, et symbolum videlicet, et Dominicam orationem in linguam Anglorum translata obtuli” [...I have myself too oftentimes given to unlearned priests both these things, to wit, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer translated into the English tongue].

Unfortunately, there are no known extant copies of Bede’s translations.

Bede begs Bishop Egbert “ut commissum tibi gregem sedulus ab irruentium luporum improbitate tuearis” [zealously to guard the flock committed to your charge from the ravening wolves which fall upon it], and the best defense is to



arm the flock with some of the knowledge entrusted to clergy and monks, knowledge that requires translation to be acquired.

Like Ælfric, Bede was a teacher and this role apparently overpowered the orthodox side of his ecclesiastical nature, which might have declared that attempting to translate scripture and articles of faith was not an enterprise to be undertaken lightly, especially for an uneducated audience who in all likelihood would misunderstand the text regardless. Similarly, after using one of the most revealing prefaces from the entire Old English corpus to announce and enumerate his fears of translation, Ælfric proceeds to face his fears and translate anyway, often violating his own theory with practice. Undoubtedly, one function of this seeming reversal is to prove to his educated readers that he is aware of the traditional arguments against translation. Unlike Bede, Alfred, and Æþelwold, Ælfric does not directly cite any of the patristic fathers in his *Prefatio*. His defense of word for word translation is so similar to Jerome's that it almost could have been "paraphrased" from a manuscript copy on hand, although there is no direct evidence the abbot possessed such a text. Ælfric appeals to his own past and tells the story of "sum mæssepreost, se þe min magister wæs on þam timan" [a certain priest, who was my teacher at the time]. Guesses as to the identity of this priest vary but it is doubtful that Æþelwold is the magister in question. Whatever complaints Ælfric has about the bishop's hermeneutic style, it is clear Æþelwold possessed more skill in Latin than the priest described, who only "be dæle Lyden

understandan" [in part could understand Latin].<sup>38</sup>

Ælfric's next section affirms a binary of meaning-making elements that constructs scripture and binds his translation practice and theory:

We secgað eac foran to þæt seo boc is swiðe deop gastlice to understandenne, and we ne writað na mare buton þa nacedan gerecednisse. Ponne þincð þam ungelæredum þæt eall þæt andgit beo belocen on þære anfealdan gerecednisse; ac hit ys swiðe feor þam.

We say also before that the book is very profound to understand spiritually, and we are not writing anything more than the naked narrative. Then it may seem to the unlearned that all that sense is locked in the simple narrative, but it is very far from that.

Scripture is divided between that which is understood spiritually, "gastlice," and that which is understood narratively, "gerecednisse." Because the spiritual level is "swiðe deop" while the narrative level is "nacedan," "þam ungelæredum" tend to be biased towards the latter type of knowledge, thereby missing the figurative message. This statement reflects Ælfric's training in the patristic tradition of biblical exegesis. Compare to Augustine's comments at the opening of *De Genesi ad Litteram*: "In the case of a narrative of events, the

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<sup>38</sup> Ælfric explains how this teacher's reading of a passage in Genesis was incorrect because he lacked appropriate knowledge of Latin and, thus, "he nyste...hu micel toðal ys betweohx þære ealdan æ and þære niwan" [he did not know...how much difference is between the old law and the new].

question arises as to whether everything must be taken according to the figurative sense only, or whether it must be expounded and defended also as a faithful record of what happened. No Christian will dare say that the narrative must not be taken in a figurative sense.”<sup>39</sup> The bishop of Hippo asserts the same dualistic perspective on meaning and cautions against reading events in the Bible purely as historical episodes. If we recall his comments in *De Civitate Dei*, however, a divinely sanctioned translation is able to retain and transmit the essential truths of scripture regardless of whatever additions, omissions, or manipulations are made in the target text.

Ælfric’s next section sees him returning to a Hieronymian defense of a literal translatology:

Nu ys seo foresæde boc on manegum stowum swiðe nearolice  
gesett, and þeah swiðe deoplice on þam gastlicum andgite, and  
heo is swa geendebyrd swa swa God silf hig gedihte þam writere  
Moise, and we durren na mare awritan on Englisc þonne þæt  
Leden hæfð, ne þa endebirdnisse awendan buton þam anum, þæt  
þæt Leden and þæt Englisc nabbað na ane wisan on þære spræce  
fandunge. Æfre se þe awent oððe se þe tæcð of Ledene on Englisc,  
æfre he sceal gefadian hit swa þæt þæt Englisc hæbbe his agene

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<sup>39</sup> Translation is from *St. Augustine, the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 1.1.

wisan, elles hit bið swiðe gedwolsum to rædenne þam þe þæs  
Ledenes wisan ne can.

Now is the aforesaid book in many spots very narrowly set, and yet very profoundly in the spiritual sense, and it is so ordered just as God himself gave it to the writer Moses, and we dare not to write more in English than the Latin has, nor to change the order except only that the Latin and the English do not have a single way in the ordering of language. Whoever translates or teaches from Latin into English always he should order it so that the English has its own way, else it is very misleading to read for those who do not know the ways of Latin.

Ælfric reasserts the difficulty of extracting the “gastlicum andgite” from the narrative of Genesis without unintended changes in his target text and language. His term “nearolice gesett” likely refers to ambiguous or dense passages that are hard to interpret regardless of the language used, calling to mind Jerome’s term “mysterium” from his *Letter* when he explained his preference for a word-for-word methodology “absque scripturis sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est” [in the case of Sacred Scripture, where the very order of the words is a mystery].<sup>40</sup> He acknowledges that because of grammatical differences between Latin and English he must occasionally alter the syntax in order to avoid creating a text that foreignizes the vernacular in a

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<sup>40</sup> English translation is from Venuti (2012), 23; Latin is from Jerome (1996), 503.

way that would be alienating for his Anglo-Saxon readers. Thus, Ælfric is aware that he is bound on the one side by the necessity of maintaining fidelity to the linguistic qualities of scripture, and on the other by an equally compelling necessity to render scripture into the vernacular in a manner that presents Genesis to his audience as if it had originally been written in English. As I will show, Ælfric's alterations expand far beyond the needs of grammar.

In his Latin prefaces, Ælfric is seeking to protect himself from learned readers – his potential critics but not his primary audience. This is obvious in part because of his choice to use the prestige. Even in non-biblical texts, the ecclesiast hastens to explain choices that might be misconstrued as careless or made in error. This is the case in the Latin preface to the *Grammar*, where at three separate points Ælfric explains his text is not for adults but for children, broadcasting his anxieties.<sup>41</sup> In this same preface, he also acknowledges the risks of any translation enterprise, as well as his own source of guidance for translation matters:

Scio multimodis verbe posse interpretari, sed ego simplicem  
interpretationem sequor, fastidii vitandi causa. Si alicui tamen  
displicuerit nostrum interpretationem, dicat quomodo vult: nos  
contenti sumus, sicut didicimus in scola Apelwoldi venerabilis  
persulis, qui multos ad bonum imbuit.

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<sup>41</sup> For Latin, Old English, and Modern English renderings of this preface, see Wilcox, at 114-15 and 130-31.

I know it is possible to translate words in many ways but I follow a simple translation for the sake of avoiding putting off the reader. If, nevertheless, our translation displeases anyone, let him express it however he wants: we are content to express it just as we mastered it in the school of the venerable prelate, Æþelwold, who inspired many to good.<sup>42</sup>

Putting adequacy before equivalence, Ælfric acknowledges that his translation strategies are guided by a didactic devotion to the needs of his audience. In the text of the *Grammar*, this usually manifests as the silent effacement of Roman cultural and pagan references, to be replaced by more familiar examples from Christian culture.<sup>43</sup> Æþelwold was the foremost translator of Latin in the early years of the Benedictine Reform but there are more differences than similarities between his and Ælfric's translation styles. While the bishop espoused and practiced Latin and vernacular writing in the hermeneutic style, modeled somewhat on the lexically and rhetorically dense writing habits of Aldhelm, he was nonetheless able to achieve an unprecedented level of fluency in his Old English translation of the Latin *Rule of St. Benedict* through a combination of skill, expert knowledge of his sources, and a willingness to make alterations if he deemed them useful for his audience. Ælfric's use of the designation "simplicem interpretationem" for the methods acquired under Æþelwold seems at odds with

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 37.

the hermeneutic affinities that populate his teacher's writings. One explanation might be that Ælfric-the-teacher advocated different strategies than he practiced as an actual translator, or that his style changed over time. Another explanation might be that despite their disagreements, Ælfric did not want to publically condemn his magister because he needs the bishop as an authoritative support for his methods. Neither, however, does the abbot resist all opportunities to criticize. In the preface to his second series of *Sermones catholici*, which I mentioned briefly in my previous chapter, Ælfric seems to explain his disagreements with a style of writing that is remarkably similar to Ælfric's:

...festinauimus hunc sequentem librum sicut omnipotentis Dei gratia nobis dictauit interpretare, non garrula uerbositate aut ignotis sermonibus, sed puris et apertis uerbis lingue huius gentis, cupientes plus prodesse auditoribus simplici locutione quam laudari artificiosi sermonis compositione — quam nequaquam didicit nostra simplicitas.

...we have hastened to translate the following book just as the grace of Almighty God dictated it to us, not with garrulous verbosity nor in unfamiliar diction but in the clear and unambiguous words of this people's language, desiring rather to profit the listeners through

straightforward expression than to be praised for the composition of an artificial style, which our simplicity has by no means mastered.<sup>44</sup>

Notice the expression of humility at the end of the passage, but more important is Ælfric's reference to "linguae huius gentis." He does not mean Latin here, but the Old English vernacular, and his aim is to domesticate the language of his sources as much as necessary to communicate what "omnipotentis Dei gratia nobis dictauit." He continues to claim that God is speaking to and through him while asserting that the most effective way to translate that message to the people is through a style of writing that undoubtedly resonates with patristic idea of *sermo humilis*.

#### E. Prosaic versus Metrical Translation<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Wilcox, 111 and 128.

<sup>45</sup> Marsden most recently updated the manuscript and transmission history for the Heptateuch in his EETS edition but a sustained inquiry into this particular aspect of Ælfric's translation is beyond the scope of my current research. For a more detailed overview of this history, see Marsden (2008), xxxiv-clxxv. However, there are some substantial differences between these translations that need to be accounted for. As I mentioned earlier, Ælfric's translation of Genesis survives more or less intact in three manuscripts, accompanied by the *Prefatio* in all these cases. Marsden postulates the existence of an archetypal manuscript linking all these texts, as well as the other codices that contain the books of the Heptateuch, and he calls this archetype *LB*. According to Marsden, "There is evidence that L's text gives us, overall (but not consistently), a rather more accurate picture of the text of *LB* than B does, especially in the *Prefatio* and Genesis" (lxxii). C only contains Ælfric's preface and translation of Genesis up to Chapter 24, and it was copied later than all the other versions, but Marsden argues its translation is perhaps older and more original than L or B, "a late copy of the precursor of this version [that] seems to bear witness, at some remove, to the oldest extant text associated with the *OEH*" (lxxii). Regardless of a higher number of corruptions and spelling variations, Marsden bases his assessment on C's closer relationship with the Vulgate Latin, reporting that "in some eighty per cent of cases, C's variant is more accurate in relation to the Vulgate [than LB's] and, given the generally faithful nature of Ælfric's translation, we need not doubt that such readings are his." Yet despite his belief in C's status, Marsden bases his edition of the *OEH* on L and B, which he notes on lxxiv. The quote is from "Ælfric's Errors: The Evidence," *Leeds Studies in English* 37 (2006), 138. He also points to the other texts in the C manuscript, all of which are Ælfrician, and the fact that the C text ends at Genesis 24:26. In L and B the style of translation abruptly shifts after this passage, signaling, perhaps, that Ælfric has completed his task as promised and everything thereafter is the work of "sum oðer man." To be fair, a few examples



In this section, I compare Ælfric's prose translation of Genesis with the versifying renderings of the metrical translator. My aim here is to highlight the conservative nature of Ælfric's translation strategy and link his statements in the *Prefatio* to his actual practice. I will also indicate some of the most common changes he introduces into his target text, as well as his errors and omissions, and postulate how these might affect the audience's interpretations. As my focus is on Ælfric and not the anonymous translator/s of *Genesis A*, I will use examples from the verse rendering to contrast the abbot's methodology. It is fitting to commence this comparison with the first sentences of the Vulgate:

In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram. Terra autem erat  
 inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei  
 ferebatur super aquas. Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux.<sup>46</sup>

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was  
 void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and  
 the spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said: Be light  
 made. And light was made.

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exist where L and B are more faithful than C. The following chart outlines some minor instances, providing, respectively, the translation in LB, then C's translation, and finally the original Vulgate:

1:11	æppelbære treow (LB)	æppeltreow	<i>lignum pomiferum</i>
3:21	eac	þa	<i>quoque</i>
13:11	his breðer	oðer	<i>a fratre suo</i>

Again, these distinctions are minor and it is hard to make an argument based solely on one- or two-word differences. Marsden, and pretty much everybody else, suggests that these discrepancies are the fault of latter day copyists and scribes and should not be used as proof of Ælfric's errors. As I rely on Marsden's edition of Genesis, my quotations follow his usage of the different manuscript versions.

<sup>46</sup> The edition of the Vulgate I quote is *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, eds. Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994). Modern English translations are from the Douay-Rheims version, *The Holy Bible* (Rheims, 1582, Douay, 1609; London, 1914).

Here is the opening of the vernacular version:

On anginne gesceop God heofenan and eorþan. Seo eorþe soþlice  
wæs ydel and æmtig and þeostru wæron ofer þære niwelnisse  
bradnisse, and Godes gast wæs geferod ofer wæteru. God cwæp þa:  
“Geweorðe leoft,” and leoft wearþ geworht.

In the beginning, God shaped heaven and earth. The earth then was  
idle and empty and darkness was over the broadness of the depths,  
and God’s spirit was borne over the waters. God said then: “Let light  
be,” and light was made.

Thus begins Ælfric’s translation of Genesis and he is, so far, adhering to the  
“nacedan gerecednisse” that he claims is his goal in the *Prefatio*. He has added  
nothing substantive, and the reason his translation is thirty-seven words and  
the Latin thirty-two is because of the latter’s grammatical capabilities. Nothing  
has been added and nothing seems to have been lost. Ælfric is translating word  
by word, the better to measure the lexical, syntactical, and grammatical values  
of his source and target languages and thereby arrive at an adequate rendering.  
He uses the Vulgate as his primary source, not the Hebrew, and as such his  
lines would be familiar to many people today raised in the western Christian  
tradition.<sup>47</sup> A closer look at the syntax of the first sentence shows the abbot has

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<sup>47</sup> There is also some evidence that a few of Ælfric’s idiosyncratic interpretations in Genesis were influenced by an Old Latin exemplar. In the following analyses and quotes, I make note whenever Old Latin might be a factor. For a thorough examination of Ælfric’s use of Old Latin, see Richard Marsden, “Old Latin Intervention in the Old English *Heptateuch*,” *Anglo-Saxon Studies* 23 (1994), 229-64.

even maintained the Latin word order: Prepositional Phrase + Main Verb + Subject + Direct Object #1 + Conjunction + Direct Object #2. The second sentence is still loyal to the content and simplistic style of the Vulgate but Ælfric uses the Old English order for possessive constructions, placing the head noun before the genitive noun, as in “niwelnisse bradnise” for “faciem abyssi” and “Godes gast” for “spiritus Dei.” And in the final clause of his translation, Ælfric maintains the passive voice of the Latin but he alters the order of the verb phrase so the sentence reads like one originally written in Old English. These are uncontestably minor changes — “variations” might be a more appropriate term. There is nothing lost here from the “nacedan gerecedness” [naked narrative] of the source, and neither does there seem to be any impoverishment of the “gastlice andgit” [spiritual sense]. To be sure, Ælfric had extensive knowledge of Genesis’ spiritual depths, plumbed as they were by a tradition of exegesis in which he later directly participated by translating Alcuin’s *Quaestiones in Genesim* in a text now circulated as *Alcuini Interrogationes Sigewulfi*. Of course, the scholarly Benedictine could not help but improve and emend the Carolingian scholar’s text, and while this knowledge assisted Ælfric in his translation, he does not include any of the hermeneutic angles therein.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The most current examination of Ælfric’s relationship with Alcuin’s text is Michael Fox’s “Ælfric’s *Interrogationes Sigewulfi*,” *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, eds. Michael Fox and Manish Sharma (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2012), 25-63.

Modern readers who turn to the opening of *Genesis A*, however, will find themselves so lost that they might very well think they have picked up the wrong text:

Us is riht micel    ðæt we rodera weard,  
wereda wuldor-cining,    wordum herigen,  
modum lufien.    He is mæгна sped,  
heafod ealra    heah-gesceafta,  
Frea ælmihtig.<sup>49</sup>

It is very right for us that we should praise with words the guardian of the heavens, the glorious king of hosts, should love him in our minds. He is abundant in powers, head of all lofty creatures, the Lord almighty.

Bereft of prefatory materials that might explain its translator's choices, *Genesis A* seems at once alien and familiar. Alien because this is obviously not how *Genesis* begins; familiar because the Old English words used are those associated with the alliterative tradition of heroic poetry that was Germanic in origin and Anglo-Saxon by inheritance. Alien, again, because these familiar words are being forced into foreign structures residing in the source text.

Scholars agree that the exemplar used by the anonymous metrical translator is the Latin Vulgate, "of a fairly pure Roman or Gregorian type, predominantly

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<sup>49</sup> All quotations from and translations of *Genesis A* are from *Old Testament Narratives*, edited and translated by Daniel Anlezark (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011). I also adhere to Anlezark's spacing and lineation, for the sake of consistency. These lines are at 2-3.

Hieronymian, with some admixture of Old Latin Elements.”<sup>50</sup> Ælfric and this translator, then, are working from similar source texts, although that is not discernable from *Genesis A*’s opening. The first 111 lines are an *exordium* and comparable in function to the opening lines of *Beowulf*: they serve as an introduction to necessary background information that will aid readers in fully understanding the contents that follow in the central text. The *exordium* to *Genesis A* ranges over a wide variety of topics, from discussions of angels and the Trinity to time and free will. None of the information in the *exordium* come from the Vulgate—the details have been gathered by the paraphrast from extra-scriptural sources, primarily exegetical commentaries, and their inclusion illustrate the translator’s skills as a scholar as well as their commitment to orthodoxy.

At line 112, the traditional narrative of Genesis begins:

Her ærest gesceop    ece Drihten,  
helm eall-wihta,    heofon and eorðan,  
rodor arærde,    and this rume land  
gestapelode    strangum mihtum,  
Frea ælmihtig.    Folde wæs þa gyta  
græs ungrene;    gar-secg þeahte  
sweart syn-nihte,    side and wide,  
wonne wegas.    Pa wæs wuldor-torht

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<sup>50</sup> A.N. Doane, *Genesis A* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin UP, 1978), 59.

heofon-weardes gast    ofer holm boren  
miculum spedum.    Metod engla heht,  
lifes brytta,    leoht forð cuman  
ofer rumne grund.    Raþe wæs gefylled  
heah-cininges hæþ;    him wæs halig leoht  
ofer westenne,    swa se wyrhta behead.

The eternal Lord, protector of all things, first created here heaven and earth, raised up the sky, and the Lord almighty established this spacious land by his strong powers. The surface was not yet green with grass; dark perpetual night oppressed the ocean far and wide, the gloomy waves. Then the gloriously splendid spirit of heaven's keeper hovered over the sea with great success. The creator of angels, the giver of life, commanded light to come forth over the spacious abyss. The high king's order was quickly fulfilled; for them there was a holy light over the void, as the maker commanded.

The paraphrast includes the same major events as Ælfric: God's separation of nothing into heaven and earth, the presence of God's spirit in the empty world, and the creation of light at God's command. Word-wise, however, the metrical translation offers seventy-two words for the Latin's thirty-two, more than doubling the original, and there is surprisingly little overlap between the vocabulary used by Ælfric and that favored in the verse translation. Where the

scholar, here at least, does not deviate from his source out of aesthetic or didactic necessity, the versifier borrows from the poetic word-hoard to create a vision of the creation that is more in line with traditional Old English heroic poetry.

Alliteration, compounds, and metrical stresses provide the appropriate poetic trappings, and readers already notice a penchant for epithets. Whereas Ælfric simply uses “God,” the versifier supplies seven different titles and never once uses “God,” as if proliferation of synonyms is a form of worship itself. This is a technique borrowed from the heroic tradition of Homer, of course, and comparable to the Beowulf-poet’s use of such descriptors as “liffrea” [Lord of Life] or “wuldres wealdend” [Wielder of Glory] for God, “leof leodcyning” [beloved king] or “heard under helme” [hard under helm] for Beowulf, and “mærne þeoden” [war-king] or “sinces brytta” [giver of treasure] for Hroþgar, and “mære mearcstapa” [might stalker of the marshes] or “feond mancynnes” [foe of mankind] for Grendel.<sup>51</sup> But the most immediate predecessor of this pattern is Caedmon’s hymn, where the cow-herd described God as “weard” [Warden], “meotodes” [Measurer], “wuldorfæder” [Glory-Father], “ece drihten” [Eternal Lord], “halig scyppend” [Holy Shaper], “moncynnes weard” [Mankind’s Warden], “frea ælmihtig” [Lord Almighty]. There are several reasons why the poet-translator would incorporate epithets: they are traditional components of

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<sup>51</sup> These quotes are found, respectively, at lines 16, 17, 54, 2539, 200, 607, 103, and 164 in Frederick Klaeber, *Klaeber’s Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, eds. John Niles, R.F. Fulk and Robert E. Bjork, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2008).

Germanic heroic poetry and are thus required and expected given his attempt to transform Genesis into an alliterative poem for an Anglo-Saxon audience; epithets allow the versifier to avoid the outright repetition that clogs the relatively simple syntax and diction of the Vulgate; epithets also serve to create more memorable constellations of imagery, helping readers follow the narrative; this technique also gives the translator a chance to show his skill with integrating stock epithets into a rigidly united text. When you remove the formulaic elements of the metrical rendering, readers are left with a loyal version of Genesis's events.

The story of Babel, often seen as the master metaphor for philosophies of language and interpretation in the classical and medieval world, is also one of the most famous events of Genesis, and it thus serves as a good passage for comparative analysis. Both Jerome and Augustine have much to say about the unification and fragmentation of human language and its implications for the state of man's knowledge in a fallen world, as does almost every hermeneut and translator since. Here is the Vulgate's version of Genesis 11:1-9:

Erat autem terra labii unius, et sermonum eorundem. Cumque proficiscerentur de oriente, invenerunt campum in terra Senaar, et habitaverunt in eo. Dixitque alter ad proximum suum: Venite, faciamus lateres, et coquamus eos igni. Habueruntque lateres pro saxis, et bitumen pro cæmento: et dixerunt: Venite, faciamus nobis civitatem et turrim, cujus culmen pertingat ad cælum: et celebremus



nomen nostrum antequam dividamur in universas terras. Descendit autem Dominus ut videret civitatem et turrim, quam ædificabant filii Adam, et dixit: Ecce, unus est populus, et unum labium omnibus: cœperuntque hoc facere, nec desistent a cogitationibus suis, donec eas opere compleant. Venite igitur, descendamus, et confundamus ibi linguam eorum, ut non audiat unusquisque vocem proximi sui. Atque ita divisit eos Dominus ex illo loco in universas terras, et cessaverunt ædificare civitatem. Et idcirco vocatum est nomen ejus Babel, quia ibi confusum est labium universæ terræ: et inde dispersit eos Dominus super faciem cunctarum regionum.

And the earth was of one tongue, and of the same speech. And when they removed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Sennaar, and dwelt in it. And each one said to his neighbor: Come let us make brick, and bake them with fire. And they had brick instead of stones, and slime instead of mortar. And they said: Come, let us make a city and a tower, the top whereof may reach to heaven; and let us make our name famous before we be scattered abroad into all lands. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of Adam were building. And he said: Behold, it is one people, and all have one tongue: and they have begun to do this, neither will they leave off from their designs, till they accomplish them in deed. Come ye, therefore, let us go down, and there

confound their tongue, that they may not understand one another's speech. And so the Lord scattered them from that place into all lands, and they ceased to build the city. And therefore the name thereof was called Babel, because there the language of the whole earth was confounded: and from thence the Lord scattered them abroad upon the face of all countries.

Here is Ælfric's rendering of this passage:<sup>52</sup>

Soðlice ealle men spræcon ane spræce. Ða þa hig ferdon fram eastdæle, hig fundon anne feld on Sennaar lande and wunedon þæron. Ða cwædon hig him betwynan: 'Uton wircean us tigelan and ælan hig on fyre.' Witodlice hig hæfdon tygelan for stan and tyrwan for weallim. And hig cwædon: 'Uton timbrian us ceastre and stypel of oþ heofon heahne. Uton wurðian urne naman ær þam þe we sin todælede geond ealle eorðan.' Witodlice Drihten astah nyþer, to þam þæt he gesawe þa burh and þone stipel the Adames bearn getimbrodon. And he cwæð: 'Dis ys an folc and ealle hig sprecap an lyden, and hig begunnon þis to wircanne. Ne geswicað hig ær þan þe hit gearu sig. Soþlice uton cuman and todælan þær heora spræce.' Swa Drihten hig todælde of þære stowe geond ealle eorðan, and for

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<sup>52</sup> This rendering is taken from the L text because in C the copyist skipped a line at 11:3-4, likely confused by the repetition of "Cumað and utan wircan" for the Latin "venite faciamus."

þam man nemde þa stowe Babel, for þam þær waeron todælede ealle spræca.

Truly all men spoke one language. Then they fared forth from the east until they found a field in Shinar land and dwelled there. Then said they between themselves: 'Let us work bricks and bake them in fire.' Certainly they had brick for stone and tar for mortar. And they said: 'Let us build a city and tower up to heaven high. Let us honor our name ere we are scattered across all the earth.' Truly the Lord stepped down to where he saw that city and tower which Adam's sons built. And he said: 'This is one folk and all speak one language, and they have begun to make this. Nor will they stop before it is ready. Thus let us come and scatter there their language.' So the Lord scattered them from that place through all the earth, and thus man named that place Babel, because there were scattered all languages.

Ælfric's translation is again very loyal and conservative and he neither adds nor omits anything significant to the narrative: indeed, the 150 words of the Vulgate have been neatly replaced by 151 words in Old English. Well, not exactly.

In terms of vocabulary and syntax, Ælfric's strategy is consistent and conservative. Unlike Æpelwold, he relies on the standard Old English lexicon instead of introducing new Latin or Greek terms. The rarest word he uses is "Babel," which, according to the Dictionary of Old English Corpus Search, only

appears in this instance in Old English. In his translation of the first verse of chapter 11, the abbot condenses the original sentence while also simplifying it. Gone is the metonymic association of humanity with “terra,” replaced by the more colloquial “ealle men.” Ælfric also eliminates the metonymic bond between “labii” [tongue] and “sermonum” [speech], choosing, again, the more common term “spræce.” Presumably these changes were meant to make the “nacedan gerecedness” more accessible for audiences by removing the embellishments of Latin rhetoric in favor of a humble style. Further down, Ælfric refrains from rendering an entire clause at 11:7, “ut non audiat unusquisque vocem proximi sui” [that they may not understand one another's speech]. This is a harder choice to defend because there is complex figurative language and the information provided is not repeated elsewhere. God has decided to punish humanity for daring to reach towards heaven by shattering its unified language into many speeches, but what will be the result of this action? Ælfric’s translation skips over the important fact that God shattered languages to disrupt human communication: this is implied, yes, but in his *Prefatio*, the abbot spent a lot of time explaining that his word-for-word translation strategy is meant to help prevent the most uneducated of readers from misinterpreting. Substituting more logical and familiar Anglo-Saxon constructions for erudite Latin tropes fits with this argument, but assuming his audience possesses sufficient knowledge of this Biblical event to allow him to leave out a line is a deviation from his stated practice. However, Ælfric likely chose to forego translating the final clause of 11:9,

which reads “et inde dispersit eos Dominus super faciem cunctarum regionum” [and from thence the Lord scattered them abroad upon the face of all countries], because he has already included this information in the previous sentence, “Swa Drihten hig todælde of þære stowe geond ealle eorðan.” Even with these changes and omissions, it is undeniable that Ælfric’s translation is loyal, giving his readers access to nothing but the “nacedan gerecedness” while eliding over a chance to dip deeper into the “gastlice andgit.”

Of course, the poet-translator of *Genesis A* would hardly skip the story of Babel: it offers a useful parallel for the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels and is a worthy subject for rendering into the tradition of Old English poetry. However, the narrative of this important episode is disjointed in *Genesis A*, stretching across multiple sections as the translator attempts to rein in genealogical passages and geographical descriptions. Genesis 11:1 is the final line of Section XIX, 1636b-1637, and the rest of the story is told in Section XX, lines 1655-1702. I have included the entire lengthy rendering to better allow an equal comparison with Ælfric’s treatment of the same story. I have underlined the words and phrases introduced into the text by the versifier to make it easier to highlight how liberal a translatology is at work:

Reord wæs þa gieta  
 eorðbuendum     an gemæne.  
 .....  
 Gesetton þa Sennar     sidne and widne  
leoda ræswan;     leofum mannum  
heora geardagum     grene wongas,

fægre foldan,    him forðwearde  
on ðære dægtide    duguðe wæron,  
wilna gehwilces    weaxende sped.  
 ða þær mon mænig    be his mægwine,  
æðeling anmod,    oðerne bæd  
 þæs hie him to mærdæ,    ær seo mengeo eft  
geond foldan bearm    toforan sceolde,  
leoda mægðe    on landsocne  
 burh geworhte    and to beacne torr  
 up arærde    to rodortunglum.  
 þæs þe hie gesohton    Sennera feld,  
swa þa foremeahtige    folces ræswan,  
þa yldestan    oft and gelome  
liðsum gewunedon;    larum sohton  
weras to weorce    and to wrohtscipe,  
oðþæt for wlence    and for wonhygdum  
 cyðdon cræft heora,    ceastre worhton  
 and to heofnum up    hlædræ rærdon,  
strengum stepton    stænenne weall  
ofer monna gemet,    mærða georne,  
 hæleð mid honda.    þa com halig god  
 weras cneorissa    weorc sceawigan,  
 beorna burhfæsten,    and þæt beacen somed,  
 þe to roderum up    ræran ongunnon  
 Adames eaforan,    and þæs unrædes  
stiðferhð cyning    steore gefremede,  
 þa he reðemod    reorde gesette  
 eorðbuendum    ungelice,  
 þæt hie þære spæce    sped ne ahton.  
 þa hie gemitton    mihtum spedge,  
teoche æt torre,    getalum myclum,  
weorces wisan,    ne þær wermægða  
 ænig wiste    hwæt oðer cwæð.  
Ne meahte hie gewurðan    weall stænenne  
up forð timbran,    ac hie earmlice  
 heapum tohlocon,    hleoðrum gedælde;  
 wæs oðerre    æghwilc worden  
 mægburh fremde,    siððan metod tobræd  
 þurh his mihta sped    monna spræce.  
 Toforan þa    on feower wegas  
æðelingas bearn    ungeþeode  
 on landsocne.    Him on laste bu

stiðlic stantorr    and seo steape burh  
samod samworht    on Sennar stod.

At that time there was still one common language for all earth-dwellers.

.....  
.....

Then the leaders of the people settled Shinar, broad and wide; in their ancient days they were green fields for dear men, at that time a beautiful earth for the troop, henceforth an increasing abundance of each good thing for them. Then many a man with his close relative, resolute prince, suggested there to the other that for their glory – before the multitudes later should move away across the earth’s bosom, the tribes of people in search of land – a city should be built and a tower raised upwards to the stars of the sky as a beacon. For that they sought out the field of Shinar, because the most powerful leaders of the nation, the most senior, dwelled happily there for a long time; with instructions, the men endeavored with work and with bickering, until by pride and by recklessness, men eager for glory manifested their skill with their hands, built a city and raised ladders upwards to the heavens, strongly erected a stone wall beyond human measure. Then the holy God came to examine the work of the generations of men, the fortress of men, and that beacon as well, which Adam’s heirs had begun to raise upwards to the skies, and the stern-minded king carried out the correction of that ill-advised deed, when, angry in mind, he established different languages for the dwellers of the earth, so that they did not possess a means of conversation. When they encountered multitudes with mighty ability at the tower, leaders of the work in great teams, none of the tribes there knew what the other said. They were not able to advance the building of the stone wall any further, but they wretchedly divided into groups, separated by their languages; each tribe had become foreign to the other, after the creator split the languages of human beings by his mighty ability. The disunited sons of princes scattered into four directions in search of land. In their wake stood both the erect stone tower and the lofty city, partly finished together at Shinar.

The version in *Genesis A* has been greatly expanded, the original 150 words swollen to 248. The opening to the story is translated fairly conservatively, except

for the addition of the poetic compound “eorðbuendum,” which makes several appearances in other metrical Old English religious texts. The translator is still using familiar poeticisms such as alliteration (“fægre foldan, him forðwearde,” “samod samworht on Sennar stod”) doublets (“sidne and widne,” “oft and gelome”), and poetic vocabulary (“geardagum,” “mægwine,” “ræswan”). There are even several *hapax legomenon* in *Genesis A* and *B*, including “stiðferhð,” “burhfæsten,” “wermægða,” and “tohlocon,” to name but a few. The interpretive additions are, however, significant. Readers are given more information about the settlers, particularly their leaders, who are focused on in *Genesis A* but make no appearance in the Vulgate. There is also more outright condemnation of the settlers from the narrator, who notes “larum sohton / weras to weorce and to wrohtscipe, / oðþæt for wlence and for wonhygdum” [with instructions, the men endeavored with work and with bickering, until by pride and by recklessness]. The versifier also provides details about the construction efforts that have no origin in Genesis. For example, the tower is raised not to heaven but to “to rodortunglum...” [stars of the sky as a beacon] — “to beacne” is the Old English phrase, and it makes concrete the abstract idealizations that were behind the construction efforts. The tower is also likened to a “strengum stepton stænenne weall / ofer monna gemet” [strongly erected a stone wall beyond human measure], or it is possible that the city and tower were joined by the addition of a stone wall. The text does not make this clear. God is humanized, called a “stiðferhð cyning” [stern-minded king] who reacts because he is “reðemod”



[angry in mind]. The poet-translator also adds more information about the result of God's actions, the very part of the narrative that Ælfric avoids, by repeating that because of the fracturing of language, the many people gathered to work on the tower could not communicate. The final lines of this translation create a striking image that has no counterpart in the Vulgate, but the translator has certainly left an impression by closing with "Him on laste bu / stiðlic stantorr and seo steape burh / samod samworht on Sennar stod."

The differences between the prose Genesis and *Genesis A* are already clear: where the poet relies on Germanic poetic aesthetics and imaginative inflation or repetition, Ælfric opts for rigorous conservatism that does sometimes eliminate seemingly important features of the Vulgate. As beautiful as the verse rendering is – and I do not mind admitting that I find its narrative more enjoyable to follow – it treats its source as a jumping off point, a catalyst that propels the poem onward but elsewhere.

#### **F. Ælfric's Errors, Omissions, and Additions**

Despite his strong correlation between textual and spiritual error, even guided by skill and cautioned by anxieties, Ælfric introduced some errors into his translation of Genesis. These mistakes are mostly minor in nature, and the examples I will explicate do not include outright transmission errors.<sup>53</sup> If Ælfric is not responsible for the mistakes, then later scribes and copyists either

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<sup>53</sup> For a thorough overview of errors limited to particular manuscripts, see Marsden (2006), at 138-42.

introduced them or they were part of an archetype that precedes the known manuscript hierarchy. Ælfric's closing paragraph in the *Prefatio* is not enough apparently to correct all scribes handling his work: "Ic bidde nu on Godes naman, gif hwa þas boc awritan wylle, þæt he hig gerihte wel be þære bysne, for þan þe ic nah geweald, þeah þe hig hwa to wo bebringe þurh lease writeras, and hit byð þonne his pleoh na min. Mycel yfel deð se unwritere, gif he nele his gewrit gerihtan" [I ask now in God's name, if anyone wants to copy this book, that he corrects it well by the exemplar, because I have no control if someone brings it to error through false writers, and it is then his peril, not mine. The bad scribe does much evil if he will not correct his errors]. Early research on the Heptateuch derided Ælfric's translation for using nonsensical words to render Latin into Old English; despite latter-day defense of these, especially by Marsden, as likely instances of transmission error, the stigma of "sub-standard" has plagued the text ever since. Karl Jost is responsible for assembling a catalogue of these errors as part of his comparison of Genesis to the other translations in the Heptateuch.<sup>54</sup> For example, there is an error that is likely, but not definitively, due to transmission at Genesis 7:10-11, which in the Vulgate reads as, "Cumque transissent septem dies aquae diluvii inundaverunt super terram anno sescentesimo vitae Noe mense secundo septimodecimo die mensis

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<sup>54</sup> See Karl Jost, "Unechte Ælfric-texte," in *Anglia* 51 (1927), 81-103 and 177-219. For Jost's collection of errors, see 195-200. He is careful to note that the C-text has a surprisingly high number of errors relative to the other manuscripts. Marsden notes this as well, although no more general argument is made by either scholar concerning the cause.

rupti sunt omnes fonts abyssi magnae...” [And after the seven days were passed, the waters of the flood overflowed the earth. In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah, in the second month, in the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep were broken up...]. Ælfric renders this passage as “Ða on ðam eahtogan dæge, þat þa hig inne wæron and God hig belocen hæfde wiðutan, þa ypode þæt flod ofer eorðan on þam oþrum monðe on ðone seofenteoðan dæg þæs monðes. Ða asprungen ealle wyllspringas þære micclan niwelnisse” [And on the eighth day, when they were in and God had locked them from outside, then flowed that flood over earth in the second month on the seventeenth day of the month. Then sprang open all the wellsprings of the great deep]. The abbot amplifies at 7:10, “þat þa hig inne wæron and God hig belocen hæfde wiðutan,” but this is not the error. Where is Noah? In the original, Noah serves as the measure of all human time, but Ælfric has curiously left the patriarch out of this passage. In the patriarch’s absence, the clause at 7:11 must grammatically connect with the previous sentence, but the logic of the resulting statement is absurd. It is highly unlikely that Ælfric would have chosen to leave out Noah – in cases of purposeful omission, there are generally discernable, if questionable, reasons. This is a unique case, however, because this error is in L, B, and C, making it also unlikely that different scribes randomly committed the same error at different times. Another peculiar omission that relates to this occurs at Genesis 8:13, when Ælfric leaves out an Old English translation of these Latin lines: “igitur

sescentesimo primo anno primo mense prima die mensis inminutae sunt aquae super terram” [Therefore in the six hundredth and first year, the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were lessened upon the earth]. While the error at 7:10-11 could be the result of carelessness, it seems Ælfric deliberately skipped the first part of 8:13, perhaps to spare his audience the numeric details in case they serve as a distraction.

Some of the “nonsensical” words and phrases Ælfric offers in his version of Genesis are actually evidence of his loyal-to-a-fault translation strategy, but they also provide insight into his ability to balance the demands of his source with the needs of his target audience. In one instance, the abbot writes for Genesis 2:3, “...he on þone dæg geswac hys weorces, þe he gesceop to wirceanne” [...he on that day ceased his work, what he had shaped to make]. The final phrase “gesceop to wirceanne” uses an infinitive of purpose to transmit the meaning of the Latin but it does not make sense in this context, or in my attempt at a literal translation, and in the entire Anglo-Saxon corpus there are no attested meanings for either word that explain Ælfric’s choosing them.<sup>55</sup> However, Jerome’s Latin is also nonsensical at this point, or at least that is what Harvey Minkoff claims. Minkoff suggests that Jerome “equally baffled” by the original Hebrew phrase, “/bara’ la’asot/,” and it is worth noting that this passage has been a thorn for generations

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<sup>55</sup> For more on this phrase, see Harvey Minkoff, “Some Stylistic Consequences of Ælfric’s Theory of Translation,” *Studies in Philology* 73.1: (1976), 30-31.

of biblical translators.<sup>56</sup> Jerome's response was radically conservative: he translated every morpheme of the Hebrew into Latin, thus creating a non-phrase for Ælfric to grapple with centuries later: "creavit ut faceret," which Douay-Rheims translates as "which God had created and made." "Et," meaning "and," makes more sense than "ut" for the infinitive meaning of the corresponding Hebrew, because "ut," when followed by the indicative, means "as" or "just as." However, Jerome uses the subjunctive with "ut," which in this case means "that," "so that," or "in order that." The abbot mimics the patriarch by rendering something empty with an equally dubious Old English phrase, but judging by his stringent control in all other areas of interpretation and translation, he mimics in full knowledge of his actions. Ælfric's self-proposed rules in the *Prefatio* dictate his response, however, for there he wrote "and heo is swa geendebyrd, swa swa God sylf hi gedihte ðam writere Moyse, and we ne durren na mare awritan on Englisc þonne ðæt Leden hæfð" [and it is so arranged, just as God Himself dictated it to the writer Moses, and we dare not write more in English than the Latin has]. Those same rules lead to another interpretively null translation of Jerome's Latin. At Genesis 17:4, the Vulgate reads "Ego sum, et pactum meum tecum" [I am, and my covenant is with thee]. Again, Jerome was at a loss when attempting to translate a Hebrew source and he mistook the copula " /'aniy /" [As for me] for the start of a nominal sentence, thus producing "Ego sum."<sup>57</sup> The Septuagint and the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 33.

Old Latin versions retain the original Hebrew construction in their editions, so Ælfric's exemplar for this passage is undeniably the Vulgate. He offers "Ic eom and min wedd mid þe" [I am and my pledge with you]. The copula verb is again elided but a meaning of sorts is still intact. In both of these "nonsense" translations, Ælfric faces a snag in his source that was introduced by Jerome, the patriarch and patron of translation. While his attempts to render the Latin may not result in the most fluid Old English prose, the abbot maintains fidelity without alienating his readers.

Ælfric also renders both of these passages in his *Sermones catholici*, resorting to different strategies to translate Jerome's Latin and providing a unique opportunity for comparison. According to Clemoes' chronology, the bulk of both series of homilies were written in 989 and 992, before the estimated production of the Genesis translation. At I.14.31-2 in the first series, Ælfric writes "...and gehalgode þone seofodan dæg, forðan ðe he on ðam dæge his weorc geendode" [and hallowed the seventh day, because on that day he ended his work].<sup>58</sup> This is a skillful and faithful condensation of the original that skips the predicament of "gesceop to wirceanne" by omitting the rather repetitive clause. The entirety of Genesis 17:4 in the Vulgate reads "Ego Deus omnipotens: ambula coram me, et esto perfectus. Ponamque foedus meum inter me et te, et multiplicabo te vehementer nimis. Ego sum, et pactum meum tecum, erisque pater multarum

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<sup>58</sup> Quotations and translations of the homilies are from *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe (London: Ælfric Society, 1844-46).

gentium" [I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee: and I will multiply thee exceedingly. And God said to him: *I am, and my covenant is with thee*, and thou shalt be a father of many nations]. I quote the full passage to illustrate how loyal Ælfric's homiletic treatment is up until the phrase in question, which I have italicized. At I.90.21-4, he translates "Ic eom Ælmihtig Drihten, gan beforan me, and beo fulfremed. *And ic sette min wed betwux me and ðe*; and ic ðe þearle gemenigfylde, and þu bist manegra þeoda fæder" [I am the Lord Almighty; walk before me and be perfect. *And I will set my covenant betwixt me and thee*, and I will exceedingly multiply thee, and thou shalt be the father of many nations]. The homily is very loyal to its source in these lines, more than some scholarly characterizations of them as "paraphrases" allow. Rather than adopt Jerome's erroneous, phonetic rendering, as he did in Genesis, Ælfric opts for dynamic equivalence and conveys only the sense of the original. These comparisons underscore Ælfric's range of translation and interpretive strategies while also helping put to rest any doubts about the abbot's capabilities: Genesis is a loyal translation, yes, but Ælfric is too knowledgeable and professional to think that nonsense Old English will convey either the "gastlicum andgite" or the "nacedan gerecednisse." However, in his *Prefatio* he determined to move forward with a word-for-word strategy that restricted the manipulations he could make. These restrictions are clear in the cases I have so far illustrated, and given the fact that Ælfric never again adopts

such a literal translatology, it is clear he chafed under those restrictions and saw them as hermeneutically debilitating rather than didactically empowering.

A different sort of “error” can be seen at Genesis 17:12, a passage that deals with the covenant of circumcision, a topic with which Ælfric has dealt before, mostly by avoiding it.<sup>59</sup> The Vulgate reads “Infans octo dierum circumcidetur in vobis omne masculinum in generationibus vestris tam vernaculus quam empticius circumcidetur et quicumque non fuerit de stirpe vestra” [An infant of eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every manchild in your generations: he that is born in the house, as well as the bought servant, shall be circumcised, and whosoever is not of your stock]. All three manuscripts of the Old English Genesis translate these lines as “Ælc hysecild betwux eow beo ymsniden on þam eahteodan dæge hys acennednysse, and ælc werhades man on eowrum mægþum and inbyrdlingum and geboht þeowa. Beo ymsniden þeah he ne beo eowres cynnes” [Each man-child among you shall be circumcised on the eighth day of his birth, and all male-sexed man in your family and the house-born slave and the bought slave shall be circumcised even though they are not of your own kind]. Instead of translating the simple and direct Latin term “et quicumque,” meaning “and whoever,” Ælfric starts a new sentence and uses “þeah.” While it is possible that corruption of the Vulgate – or, even more unlikely, an Old Latin – exemplar altered the original to a similarly concessive word or phrase, like “et cumque”

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<sup>59</sup> Samantha Zacher looks at Anglo-Saxon treatments of circumcision, including Ælfric’s, in “Circumscribing the Text: Views on Circumcision in Old English Literature,” *Old English Literature and the Old Testament*, 89-120.



[and when], there is another suggestion. The original Hebrew for these lines uses the final clause to amplify the previous statement, “the bought slave,” apparently to reiterate that circumcision applies to the whole household.<sup>60</sup> Ælfric does not have to possess knowledge of Hebrew to transport this meaning into his vernacular translation because other biblical scholars and interpreters were aware of this meaning even if Jerome seems not to be. For example, in *De Civitate Dei* at 16.26, Augustine renders the passage as “The slave born in your house and the slave bought from anyone of another nation, who is not of your seed, shall be circumcised, the house-slave and the bought slave.”<sup>61</sup> Augustine is relying on the Old Latin version of the book here, and there is some minor evidence that others of Ælfric’s translation choices might stem from his knowledge of an Old Latin exemplar. If that is the case, then in this instance the Anglo-Saxon scholar has in fact corrected Jerome and recuperated some original meaning with his Old English translation.<sup>62</sup>

In the previous chapter, I showed examples of bias in Æpelwold’s translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict*—he modified passages related to the granting and keeping of church-land, for example. Ælfric’s translation of Genesis is usually loyal to its source but there are certain issues the abbot chose to omit from the narrative, betraying his biases. These are not errors but they are deviations away

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<sup>60</sup> See Marsden (2006), 147-48.

<sup>61</sup> *City of God*, 686. Here is the Latin: “Vernaculus et empticius ab omni filio alieno, qui non est de semine tuo, circumcisione circumcidetur uernaculus domus tuae et empticius.”

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed exploration of Old Latin in Genesis, see Richard Marsden, “Old Latin Intervention in the Old English *Heptateuch*,” *Anglo-Saxon Studies* 23 (1994), 229-64.

from the source and give insight into the abbot's didactic concerns. One important omission occurs at Genesis 19:4-11, dealing with the episode of the Sodomites and the angels. In the Vulgate, the passage runs to 127 words but Ælfric does not bother to try to translate it faithfully. Instead he warns his readers of the dire content of the original and implies that even to read or write of it would be to risk contamination: "Se leodschipe wæs swa bysmorfull þæt hig woldon fullice ongear gecynd heora galnysse gefyllan, na mid wimmannum ac swa fullice þæt us sceamað hyt openlice to secgenne, and þæt wæs heora hream þæt hig openlice heora fylpe gefremedon" [The nation was so shameful that they wanted foully against nature to fulfill their lusts, not with women but so foully that it shames us to say it openly, and that was their noise, that they openly committed their filth]. We might question what exactly Ælfric wants to hide more, the homosexual behavior of the citizens of Sodom or Lot's proffering of his daughters for rape. Some scholars argue that Ælfric's omission of this event would have struck his audience – Æþelweard, for example – as odd, especially if the cause is his vehement abhorration of the Sodomites' sexual activities. While modern readers might associate Sodom with a particular sinful act, David Clark presents a wealth of evidence arguing that "the vast majority of references to the Sodom narrative associate it with general sinfulness, or non-specific sexual sin...it is far from certain that lay audiences would have assumed same-sex acts were at issue, rather than masturbation or bestiality or some other dimly imagined sin."<sup>63</sup> If, then,

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<sup>63</sup> *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (New York:

Ælfric is not moved by any over-riding crusade against one sin in particular, he might be protecting his audience against all kinds of sin.

This desire can be traced back to the *Prefatio* when he expresses his worry that “gif sum dysig man þas boc ræt oððe rædan gehyrð, þæt he wille wenan þæt he mote lybban nu on þære niwan” [if some foolish person this book reads or hears it read that he will think that he may live now in the new law just as the patriarchs lived then in that time before the old law was appointed]. Ælfric might not want to give readers access to information about any sin, in case reading about sinful activity in scripture leads readers to believe such activity is actually not forbidden. This would also help explain his omission of another episode involving Lot and his daughters. At Genesis 19:32-36, the Vulgate describes how Lot’s daughters got him drunk so they could lay with him and become pregnant. The key passage is 32-33, which reads:

‘Veni inebriemus eum vino dormiamusque cum eo ut servare possimus ex patre nostro semen.’ Dederunt itaque patri suo bibere vinum nocte illa et ingressa est maior dormivitque cum patre at ille non sensit nec quando accubuit filia nec quando surrexit.

‘Come, let us make him drunk with wine, and let us lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.’ And they made their father drink wine that night: and the elder went in, and lay with her father:

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OUP, 2009), 100.

but he perceived not, neither when his daughter lay down, nor when she rose up.

Ælfric manipulates his source slightly in these next lines, choosing some non-literal translations:

‘Uton fordrencean urne fæder færllice mid wine and uton licgan mid him þæt sum laf beo hys cynnes.’ Hi didon þa swa and fordrencton heora fæder and eode seo yldre swyster ærost to his bedde, and se fæder nyste hu he befeng on his for þære druncenysses, ne hu heo dearnunga aras.

‘Let us make drunk our father quickly with wine and let us lie with him so that there shall be some remnant of his kin.’ They did just that and made drunk their father and went the elder sister first to his bed, and the father knew not how he clasped her for the drunkenness, nor how she secretly arose.

The phrase “hu he befeng” covers all manner of evils, or at least, in this case, the sinful act of incest. Ælfric also glosses over Jerome’s use of “semen” by selecting a generic vernacular term, “cynnes.” These omissions are in line with the previous exclusions in Genesis 19 and together they demonstrate the likelihood that Ælfric did not skip sections out of carelessness but rather as part of a didactic editorial procedure. In these cases, because the audience cannot be trusted to look past the “nacedan gerecednisse” to the “gastlicum andgite,” Ælfric elides over the original by modifying it in Old English. This method seems to violate his desire to

“na mare awritan on Englisc þonne þæt Leden hæfð” [not write more in English than the Latin has], but maybe he is being literal here as well and interpreting his doctrine to imply that while adding to the Latin is bad, leaving certain things out is acceptable if doing so is for the spiritual good of readers. Æpelwold adopted this stance with his translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and although his student Ælfric does not inherit the bishop’s hermeneutic prose, the abbot’s translatology indicates he felt he was imbued with a certain amount of authority over his source and target text.

Expansions are less frequent than omissions in Ælfric’s Genesis, so it is no surprise that the latter have received more attention from scholars interested in the translation. At the level of the word, however, Ælfric often adds one or two extra terms in the vernacular, usually to define or clarify something in the Vulgate. Readers see this rendering, for example, at Genesis 3:6, describing Adam and Eve’s bite of the apple, which in the Vulgate reads “Vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile et tulit de fructu illius et comedit deditque viro suo qui comedit” [And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, who did eat]. Ælfric translates the Latin nearly word for word – even maintaining fidelity to the Latin sentence structure – except for one unusual addition, indicated by italics: “Ða geseah þæt wif þæt þæt treow wæs god to etanne, *be þan þe hire þuhte*, and wlitig on eagum and lustbære on gesihðe, and genam þa of þæs treowes

wæstmē and geæt and sealed hire were; he æt þa" [Then the wife saw that that tree was good to eat from, *as it seemed to her*, and fair to the eye and pleasurable to see, and she took of that tree's fruit and ate and gave to her husband; he ate then]. The phrase "*be þan þe hire þuhte*" has no cognate in the Vulgate and it stands out amidst a sea of attempts at equivalency. Ælfric's insertation can be interpreted a number of ways: the abbot might be emphasizing Eve's culpability over Adam's, or he could be trying to illustrate that she made a mistake. A third reading fits with other examples of Ælfric's translation choices: the consummate teacher has his impressionable audience in mind and thus opts to include this statement in order to stress that even though the tree seemed to Eve to contain inviting fruit, that was a result of her perspective and not the truth.<sup>64</sup> From the Anglo-Saxon point of view, the New Testament had superseded the Old Testament and thus Genesis was most important for how it connected typologically with New Testament events.

The abbot of Eynsham makes another admonitory addition to the Vulgate at Genesis 17:27. This passage describes the circumcision of Abraham's household: "*Et omnes viri domus illius tam vernaculi quam empticii et alienigenae pariter circumcisi sunt*" [And all the men of his house, as well they that were born in his house, as the bought servants and strangers, were circumcised with him]. Again, Ælfric maintains his word-for-word preference up until the very end: "And ealle

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<sup>64</sup> For further cataloguing and analysis of Ælfric's changes specifically involving Eve, see John Flood, *Representations of Eve in Antiquity and the English Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 49-51.

werhades men hys inhiredes, ægþer ge imbyrdlingas ge gebohte þeowan, and ælpeodige menn þe him mid wæron, ealle wurdon þæs dæges ymsnidene. *Nu secge we betwux þisum þæt nan cristen man ne mot nu swa don*” [And all male-sexed men of his house, both the house-born and the bought slaves, and foreign men who were with him, all were on that day circumcised. *Now we say amidst this that no Christian man may now do so*]. Ælfric’s inserted sentence is another reminder to readers that although this is the habit and law of Jews in the Old Testament, contemporary Anglo-Saxon Christians cannot abide by the same traditions. In fact, the sentence is apparently so significant that some scribe underlined it in the B manuscript. These examples lend credence to the line of argument that this is a theme behind some of the abbot’s additions in Genesis, that “[t]he rest of Ælfric’s writings suggest the same; again and again in his works he admonishes his audience that the Old Testament is not to be followed in the manner of the Jews.”<sup>65</sup>

There is a rather minor example at Genesis 15:12-14, where Ælfric clarifies the source of Abraham’s dream: “Eft ða on æfnunge befeoll slæp on Abram, and micel oga him becom þa mid þeostrum. Him wæs þu gesæd *swutelice þurh God*...” [Again in the evening sleep befell on Abraham, and great dread seized him in the dark. It was said to him *plainly through God*...]. Compare this to the Vulgate, “Cumque sol occumberet sopor inruit super Abram et horror magnus et tenebrosus invasit eum. Dictumque est ad eum...” [And when the sun was setting,

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Don Tjapkes, “The Old Testament and Medieval English Law: the Decline of Law as Revelation from 995-1215” (Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1993), 30.

a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great and darksome horror seized upon him. And it was said unto him...]. By inserting “swutelice þurh God,” Ælfric makes it explicit that the visions come from God, perhaps to counteract the horrific appearance of the manifestation and assure readers of its divine source. There is no base for this phrase in the Vulgate, so he has abandoned his conservative style in order, once again, to steer his readers in the proper hermeneutic direction. It is a similar pedagogic mindset that leads Ælfric to insert an explanatory adjective at Genesis 20:14, “Ða genam Abimelech oxan and scep, wealas and wylna, and forgeaf Abrahame, and his wif him betæhte *ungewemmed*” [Then Abimelech took the oxen and sheep, slaves and servants, and gave them to Abraham, and delivered his wife to him *undefiled*]. The word “ungewemmed” has no origin in the Vulgate, which Ælfric otherwise renders loyally in this sentence, although the alliteration of “wealas and wylna” is also an Anglo-Saxon mannerism. He uses this word to assure his readers that Abraham’s wife, Sarah, has been returned to him unviolated sexually, thereby preventing misguided assumptions. I imagine Ælfric was rather happy to be able to assure his audience that, at least in this instance, the men and women of the Old Testament did not always abide by laws that were heinous from the perspective of the tenth century.

### **G. Ælfric and Esther: A New Approach to Biblical Translation**

Readers who analyze only Ælfric’s translation of Genesis will have a very one-sided idea of the abbot’s practices and theories of interpretation. The Ælfric of Genesis is a skilled Latin scholar, well versed in orthodox Biblical



exegesis, and firmly following in the translation tradition of the patriarch Jerome. But this initial conservative strategy does not display Ælfric's later, robust Old English style, his aggressive manipulation of scripture, or his gradual confidence in his legacy. Ælfric's preoccupation with the hazards presented by his audience for Genesis led him to focus on the "nacedan gerecednisse," thereby creating a loyal rendering that seems strangely out of place alongside the remarkably innovative, if occasionally misguided, translations of Alfred and Æpelwold. As the above comparisons reveal, except for minor errors that are possibly the result of transmission and not simply products of Ælfric's translation efforts, and didactic additions and omissions that rarely add up to more than a handful of words, Ælfric's word-for-word translation is somewhat unexciting. However, the abbot's rendering of the book of Esther represents the polar opposite strategy, the maturation of his translation methodology: word-for-word is abandoned and even sense-for-sense fails to accurately convey the amount and type of liberties Ælfric takes with his sources in his later period. Entire swathes of scripture are eliminated and replaced with exposition that alters some of the driving themes of the original text.

Ælfric's contributions to the rest of the Heptateuch, primarily Numbers, Joshua, and Judges, are not often as literal as his rendering of Genesis, and only parts of the latter books are treated. Other Biblical translations not included by the compiler(s) of the Heptateuch—those texts in the *Sermones catholici* and

*Lives of Saints* – are markedly less conservative. How do scholars account for this hermeneutic turnabout, most clearly evident in *Macabees*, *Job*, *Judith*, and *Esther*? While I have not been able to locate any study that poses the question directly, a few scholars prefer to label Ælfric’s style of translation “paraphrase.” Early usage of this distinction is dismissive of the abbot’s contributions.<sup>66</sup> A particularly illustrative example, *The Cambridge History of the Bible* labels Claudius Cotton B. iv as “Ælfric’s paraphrase of the Heptateuch in Old English.”<sup>67</sup> The same volume also states, “Ælfric is however an excerpter and expositor rather than a translator. When he speaks of having turned Scripture into English, his practice is best thought of as adaptation.”<sup>68</sup> Other medieval scholars have found Ælfric’s renderings difficult to label. For example, one critic comments “it is doubtful if his version [of the Old Testament] could be called a translation in the strict meaning of the word since he sometimes omitted sentences and paraphrased freely.”<sup>69</sup>

Ann Nichols offers a compelling argument about the difference between “translation” and “paraphrase” when she analyzes Ælfric’s use of “awendan” and “gesettan” in his translation-related prefaces and letters.<sup>70</sup> The *Dictionary of Old English* lists “to turn, move” as the primary meaning for “awendan,” with “to

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<sup>66</sup> This is still common in peer-reviewed publications: Daniel Orton uses this terminology in “Royal Piety and Davidic Imitation: Cultivating Political Capital in the Alfredian Psalms,” *Neophilologus* 99.3 (2015), 477-492.

<sup>67</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: Volume 2, The West from the Fathers to the Reformation Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 538.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>69</sup> W. Schwarz, “The History of Principles of Bible Translation in the Western World,” *Babel* 9 (1963), 8.

<sup>70</sup> Ann Eljenholm Nichols, “‘Awendan’: A Note on Ælfric’s Vocabulary,” *JEGP* 63.1 (1964), 7-13.

change” as a secondary meaning, and “to translate” as a tertiary branch of this meaning. The *DOE* has not reached “gesettan” yet, but Bosworth-Toller define it first as “to set, put,” with “compose” appearing near the end of its list of common meanings. According to Nichols, “awendan” is Ælfric’s preferred Old English term for the Latin “transferre” and she finds that the abbot commonly uses it to refer to acts of both paraphrase and translation. Another important word is “gesettan,” which Ælfric uses in the *Libellus* to refer to renderings of Judith, Kings, and the gospels. However, Nichols argues that “Ælfric uses gesettan only of work that can be classified as paraphrase, and in these contexts it is probably best translated by ‘write’ or ‘compose.’ It is significant that he does not use this word to refer to his translation of Genesis. In the English preface to that work, he uses only awendan.”<sup>71</sup> This pattern of usage cannot be used as evidence of anything, which Nichols admits, but it is worth thinking about because of how Ælfric’s translation methods can be divided into two distinct sets of target texts: Genesis, on the one hand, and on the other, every other translation from his career.

I am inclined to believe that Ælfric’s attempt at a literal translation of Genesis was at least in part a failed experiment – the abbot wanted to treat his sacred source text with all the respect it deserved and so he looked to the example set by Jerome and adopted a similarly literal strategy. The number of Genesis commentaries from patristic and early medieval writers far exceeds the commentaries written for the other Old Testament books. Genesis is more

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 10.

mythical than historical, and thus it invites more abstraction and exegesis. When Ælfric tells his patron “Ic cweþe nu þæt ic ne dearr ne ic nelle nane boc æfter þissere of Ledene on English awendan” [I say now that I dare not nor do I desire any book to translate after this from Latin into English], if Nichols’ argument holds true, perhaps he means he is only giving up word-for-word translation when he uses “awendan.” If that is the case, this would mean that the abbot is not violating his own promise in the *Prefatio* because he might consider all of his other translated texts as belonging in a category separate from Genesis. However, there is also evidence that Ælfric’s use of these terms may not be grounds for discrete classifications. For example, still in the *Prefatio*, he writes, “ic ne dearr ic nelle nane boc æfter ðisre of Ledene on Englisc awendan” [I neither dare nor want to translate any book from Latin into English after this]. “Awendan” is here referring to his translation of Genesis, but since, in Nichols’ theory, “gesettan” is only used for “translation proper,” here Ælfric is labeling Genesis with a term that could mean both translation and paraphrase. Nichols’ theory is intriguing, perhaps moreso because of its relative abandonment by medieval translation scholars.<sup>72</sup> However, it is also clear that Nichols does not view paraphrase as of equal value or weight as “translation proper.”<sup>73</sup> This is not a view I support since it

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<sup>72</sup> Kathleen Davis mentions Nichols, but does not engage her, in a footnote to her own groundbreaking work on Old English translation, “The Performance of Translation Theory in King Alfred’s National Literary Program,” in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, eds. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2000), 166. Wilcox, in *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, pushes against this terminology argument by claiming instead that the abbot merely changed his mind: see pages 38-44.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

would mean relegating to secondary status nearly the entire life's work of not just one of the greatest Anglo-Saxon scholars but one of the most influential ecclesiastical writers of the entire early medieval period.

#### **H. *Libellus de ueteri testamento et nouo***

For more clues to the abbot's shifting methodologies, I will now turn to Ælfric's *Letter to Sigeweard*, circulated as *Libellus de ueteri testamento et nouo* and variously known as "On the Old and New Testament" and "Treatise on the Old and New Testament." Its final section contains an assessment of interpretation and meaning that is clearly a more sophisticated restructuring of the thoughts Ælfric expressed in the *Prefatio*, which was written perhaps ten years before. The only complete copy of the *Libellus* is included in the L manuscript, following the other Heptateuchian material. The Old Testament section is also found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343 (item 65, ff. 129<sup>r</sup>-132<sup>r</sup>). There are fragments in two other manuscripts: London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius C.V and London, British Library, Harley 3271. Apparently Sigeweard had requested works from Ælfric several times and the abbot eventually sent this document in reply, persuaded by the man's good works. Very little is known about Sigeweard, and besides in the *Libellus* his name only appears elsewhere as a signatory on a charter for the founding of Eynsham. Even this fact is somewhat in doubt because the name is spelled "Siward," but no further

details can be deduced.<sup>74</sup>

Because of the lateness of the *Libellus*, it reveals in particular details about Ælfric's hermeneutic ideas, acquired over a lifetime of commentary, exegesis, and translation. Thus, it also provides a basic didactic framework for an understanding of orthodox Christian doctrine and concludes with a book-by-book overview of the Bible. Ælfric educates Sigeweard in the topic of *Heilsgeschichte*, "holy history," the story of God's plan for the ultimate redemption of humanity. This plan is announced in the Old Testament and revealed by exegesis – the New Testament can only be understood as the revealed plan in the form of Jesus Christ, the promise of the Old Testament. Ælfric is not concerned with human or world history and he never comments on real world events. Ælfric's *Prefatio* is much shorter than the *Libellus*, and it sticks to the topic of problems with biblical translation, while the Letter's focus ranges far and wide and contains analyses and commentary in a higher register.

As I illustrated previously, in the *Prefatio* Ælfric established a divide

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<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of the *Libellus*, Ælfric reveals Sigeweard is in East Halon, east of Eynsham, and at the close of the letter the abbot makes this comment: "Ðu woldest me laðian, þa þa ic wæs mid þe, þæt ic swiðor drunce swilce for blisse ofer minum gewunan. Ac wite þu, leof man, þæt se þe oðerne neadað ofer his mihte to drincenne, þæt se mot aberan heora begra gil[t], gif him ænig hearm of þam drence becymð" [You wanted to invite me, when I was with you, that I drink more, for pleasure, and beyond my habit, but know, beloved man, that he who compels another to drink beyond his strength bears the guilt of both if any harm comes from that over-drinking]. "Leof man" is a term denoting a certain personal relationship, Ælfric's sermon against drinking notwithstanding. Because Sigeweard has made repeated requests for Ælfric's works but is not identified as an ecclesiastical figure, we can assume that he was at least a low-ranking noble who could read the vernacular. Ælfric enjoyed the limelight as England's most famous writer and it is not surprising for him to have received interest from secular lords who wanted to amass their own personal libraries. He wrote other letters to Sigefyrþ and Wulfgeat that were similarly focused on catechesis and morality.

between language and its rhetorical potential: scripture is not simply information that can be assimilated by the mere act of reading. A superficial understanding of the Bible is dangerous because it misses both the spiritual sense of meaning, “gastlice andgit,” and the crucial hermeneutic mode of typology that links the Old and New Testaments. Allegorical exegesis is fraught with difficulty and even educated priests can interpret incorrectly. Translating the “nacedan gerecednis” ensures that readers will need exegetical guidance to unlock the reservoirs of spiritual significance below the literal surface; it also removes potential obstacles such as references to ancient habits that have changed and no longer fit the morals of the Catholic faith. However, this method of translation suggests that Ælfric believes you can separate the ineffable kernel of Divine Meaning from its linguistic trappings while still preserving an intimation of sacred truth. It is this intimation that lay readers encounter in the “nacedan gerecednis,” thereby allowing “the faithful [to] experience the presence of God's word without beginning to understand its meaning.”<sup>75</sup>

Stanton argues that this philosophy of meaning allows Ælfric to negate the status differences between Old English and Latin, thereby empowering the vernacular as a type of *sermo humilis* that does not need prestige or legacy to convey a level of Biblical meaning approachable without exegetical training. By the time of the writing of the *Libellus*, 1002-1005, Ælfric is so confident in his

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<sup>75</sup> Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England*, 134.

translations that he distinguishes them from other versions and summaries most obviously by often referring to them. For example, this occurs when he is touching on Job, Esther, Judith, and Macabees, but there are many other self-referential notes elsewhere, from the beginning to the end. He is indicating that there is an extensive canon of vernacular biblical translations and in doing so he “marks off his own reliable, orthodox body of vernacular writing from any other erroneous versions.”<sup>76</sup> This is a great change from the Ælfric of the *Prefatio*, where he vehemently declared his defiance to his long-time patron and swore never to translate another book again. At the writing of the *Prefatio*, the furthest thing from Ælfric’s mind is the enterprise of almost single-handedly creating the most extensive corpus of English vernacular scripture ever seen in England, one that would not be rivaled for centuries. But in the *Libellus*, Ælfric seems aware of the deplorable state of vernacular translation and he is therefore ready to shoulder more responsibility, not to mention authority. He does not send his reader searching for patristic editions but assures Sigeweard that his body of work is reliable. For example, when summarizing Judges at lines 249-52, the abbot notes, “Ðis man mæg rædan, se þe his recð to gehireene, on þære Engliscan bec þe ic awende be þisum. Ic þohte þæt ge wuldon þurh ða wundorlican race eower mod awendan to Godes willan on eornost” [This one may read, he who wishes to hear, in that English book which I translated about this. I thought that you would through that wonderful account turn your mind to the will of God in earnest].

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<sup>76</sup> Wilcox, 41.



Ælfric reiterates that the point of his translations is to render the will of God clearer for those unable to encounter the divinity in its Latin sources. He even refers to his collection of translated texts as “ure bibliothecan,” a word that can mean “library” but that likely here means “bible.” Clearly Ælfric does not worry anymore that his vernacular renderings are incorrect, misleading, or sub-standard. He is claiming that he has in fact produced a vernacular Bible of sorts.

The manipulation of source texts for didactic ends that Ælfric defends is somewhat akin to the dynamic equivalency that many modern translators of the Bible have adopted, following the recommendations of famed biblical scholar and translator Eugene Nida. Nida defines dynamic translation as aiming to replicate “in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message.”<sup>77</sup> The goal with this methodology is not to reproduce the grammatical, syntactical, or lexical properties of a source text because these linguistic elements are not where the kernel of authentic meaning is held, according to practitioners of dynamic translation. Instead, what matters is the response the original text demands from its readers. Ælfric, for example, has complete faith that the story of Esther can be used to educate and prepare Anglo-Saxon readers for Christian truths, but he has to filter the original text in order to draw out what matters. Nida also believes “Anything that can be said in one language can certainly be said in another language,” further expressing his support of an extra-linguistic meaning that inheres not in language but in human cognition and interpretation. This

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<sup>77</sup> Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 12.

might be common ground for Ælfric and translators who follow Nida's advice. Not Ælfric the translator of Genesis, but the Ælfric who translated Judith, Esther, Macabees, and his other, later vernacular renderings. He even starts the Letter with a meditation on the value of good deeds:

Ic secge þe to soðan þæt se bið swiðe wis se þe mid weorcum spricð  
and se hæfð forþgang for Gode and for worulde, se ðe mid godum  
weorcum hine sylfne geglengð, and þæt is swiðe geswutelod on  
halgum gesetnissum þæt þa halgan weras þe gode weorc beeodon  
þæt hi wurðfulle wæron on þissere worulde and nu halige sindon on  
heofenan rices mirhþe, and heora gemynd þurhwunað nu a to  
worulde for heora anrædnisses and heora trywðe wið God.

I say to you truly that he is very wise who with his deeds speaks and  
who advances before God and before the world, who with good  
works adorns himself, and it is very manifest in the holy canon that  
those holy men who cultivated good works were honorable in this  
world and are now the holy in the joy of the kingdom of heaven, and  
their memory will remain now always and forever in the world for  
their resolution and their faith in God.

It is clear that Ælfric sees himself as one of those "halgan weras" who promotes the Christian Truth through his teachings and, more importantly, his translations. Whereas in the *Prefatio* to Genesis he swears off attempting to translate ever again, in the *Libellus* he has arrived at a vastly different conclusion. These translations are

how the abbot “þe mid weorcum spricð”; they are his legacy, the accomplishment that will keep his memory alive through the ages.

In the closing section of the letter, lines 919-23, the abbot appeals to the traditional binary of word and deed to continue his case:

weorc sprecað swiþor þonne þa nacodan word, þe nabbað nane fremminge. Is swa þeah god weorc on þam godan wordum, þonne man oðerne lærð and to geleafan getrimð mid þære soþan lare and þonne mann wisdom sprecð manegum to þearfe and to rihtinge, þæt God si geherod se þe a rixað.

works speak more than the naked words, which have no effect. But there is nonetheless good work in good words, when one teaches another, and strengthens him in his belief with truthful teaching, and when one speaks wisdom for the benefit and the correction of many, to the praise of God who rules forever.

Ælfric’s distinction between “weorc” and “nacodan word” recalls his focus on “nacedan gerecednis” in the *Prefatio*. In the earlier work he had defended his translation by assuring Æþelweard that he would stick to the literal narrative, far less difficult to comprehend than the allegorical passages but also less revealing of God’s divinity. It takes the combination of both the narrative and spiritual levels of meaning to access the Truth of the Word and experience all that scripture offers. In the next line, Ælfric now refers to his translations as “godan wordum” and his reader, Sigeweard, is to understand at this point that

Ælfric's translations are the good ones. The remaining sentences reinforce that Ælfric's vernacular translation enterprise is a didactic one "...manegum to þearfe and to rihtinge." Translations are a tool for teaching and, no matter how accurate, are subject to the skills of their users. Ælfric's support of the instrumental function of language and his newfound confidence in asserting a strong hermeneutic role for his translations, unlike the separating of "gastlice andgit" and "nacedan gerecednis" in the *Prefatio*, tackles this risk head on. By the writing of the *Libellus* Ælfric can present his audience with not just a single text but an entire "bibliothecan." Thus, it is with far less hesistance that the abbot manipulates Esther to render for his audience a didactically sound text that incorporates within itself whatever exegetical freedoms Ælfric deems important. And beyond the content of scripture, Ælfric also rejects the stylistically bland prose he used for Genesis in favor of his rhetorically- and aesthetically-rich rhythmic prose.

### **I. Esther: Background Information**

The Old Testament story of Esther rendered in vernacular English appears in a single manuscript dating from the early seventeenth century, Oxford, Bodleian, MS. Laud Misc. 381, ff. 140v-148.<sup>78</sup> According to Ker, the contents of the manuscript, some 330 lines of "rhythmic prose," are in the hand of antiquarian William L'Isle, who titles the collection *Divers Ancient Monuments*. L'Isle makes no note of the manuscript's source but he includes transcriptions of several other Ælfrician homilies as well as some passages from the *Ancrene*

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<sup>78</sup> Hereafter referred to as M, following S. D. Lee's practice.

Wisse. L'Isle's version of Esther is the only surviving copy of this vernacular rendering and is the base of all contemporary studies of the translation. He also includes his own translation of the text, although there are too many errors to treat his version as a suitable edition for comparative analysis. There is little doubt as to the authorship of the translation: not only are the majority of other texts contained in the manuscript written by Ælfric, but L'Isle includes a headnote that describes the contents as:

More of the ould Testament  
quoted in the Saxon homilies *whi\ch/*  
are entitled in Latine Catholici Sermones:  
  
& translated \into the ould English/ by Ælfricus Abbas.<sup>79</sup>

The closest evidence of direct attribution comes from Ælfric himself, when in the *Libellus* at lines 460-62 he writes “Hester seo cwen, be hire kynn ahredde, hæfð eac ane boc on þisum getele, for ðan þe Godes lof ys gelogod þæron. Ða ic awende on Englisc on ure wisan sceortlice” [Esther the queen, who freed her kin, has also one book in this series, because the love of God is arranged therein. That I have translated in English in our way shortly]. There are also numerous stylistic, lexical, and grammatical similarities between Esther and the rest of Ælfric's known corpus. While these individual proofs are not conclusive, when considered

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<sup>79</sup> Lee, IV.1, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm>.

together they highlight the likelihood of the abbot's authorship.<sup>80</sup>

A summary of Esther's narrative and an overview of its thematic concerns are necessary before further study of the text and Ælfric's translation can be undertaken. I am unable to do better than Stuart D. Lee, who provides a summary as part of his recent edition of Esther, Judith, and Macabees:

The story is set in Susa, at the palace of the Persian King Xerxes I ('Assuerus' or 'Artaxerxes'), around the mid-fifth century B.C. Having abandoned his wife (Queen Vasthi), the king marries the beautiful Jewess Esther. The plot then centres on the schemes of the Chief Vizier, Aman, who is determined to see all the Jews in the country slaughtered and to bring about the downfall of both Esther, and her foster-father Mordecai. However, Esther thwarts the plan and the Jews are reprieved. Aman is hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and on the 13th of Adar (February/March), the day previously assigned for their genocide, the Jews are allowed to defend themselves and gain victory.<sup>81</sup>

Like Judith and the Macabees, Esther features a Jewish heroine rescuing her

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<sup>80</sup> According to Clemoes' chronology, Esther was written between 1002-1005, after Genesis and its *Prefatio* but before the *Letter to Sigeward*. Despite pushback from Godden (see "Ælfric's Changing Vocabulary," *English Studies* 61 [1980], 206-23), Lees agrees, and states, "there are no good reasons to move from the dating guidelines put forward by Clemoes" (VI. 1, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm>). It is impossible to be more exact on the temporal gap between Genesis and Esther but it is sufficient in scope to allow Ælfric to have conceived of a radically singular translation methodology.

<sup>81</sup> All references to Lee and Old English quotations of Esther are from Stuart D. Lee's electronic edition, *Ælfric's Homilies on Judith, Esther, and the Maccabees* (University of Oxford, 1999), <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm>.

people, and in the case of Esther the doom they escape is genocide. In all three, once the beleaguered Jews put their trust in God, divine retribution insures their victory over their heathen oppressors. Ælfric provides no commentary to accompany his translation and guide readers towards an appropriate interpretation, putting it at odds with Genesis and its essential *Prefatio*.

However, nothing is known about the editorial procedures that led to L'Isle's transcriptions, and it is possible that he excised some of Ælfric's introductory or concluding thoughts. It is indeed strange for the abbot to have left the act of exegesis up to his audience for this quirky text since to many medieval readers, Esther must have been quite shocking in comparison to the other ecclesiastical narratives of saints' lives and autobiographical confessions. It lacks both the holy event of the martyr's *passio* and the confessor's moment of revelation: the good guys overcome and there is no sudden downfall or foreshadowing of doom.

Like the book of Esther itself throughout the early years of Christianity, Ælfric's Old English translation remains neglected by contemporary scholarship. Bruno Assman produced the first edition of the text in 1889 and Clemoes' 1964 reprint remains the standard for many scholars, although Lee's online edition is a much-needed update that incorporates Assman's commentary and, because of the online format, can be – and is – updated regularly. A search for “Esther” and “Ælfric” in the Old English Newsletter Bibliography Database returns only four items; the same search in the International Medieval Bibliography turns up two of

those same studies. Because of its late date and separation from the rest of Ælfric's *Sermones catholici*, Esther receives little attention in comparison. There has been some attention to Ælfric's use of Esther as an ideal for queens, a "Speculum Reginae" to counterbalance to *Beowulf's* potential status as a mirror for kings.<sup>82</sup>

## J. Rhythmical Prose

One of the most obvious differences between Ælfric's Genesis and Esther is his use in the latter of the unique "rhythmical prose" style that is characteristic of his later writings. It is generally accepted that Ælfric started to use rhythmical prose in the later parts of the second series of *Sermones catholici* but that his mastery of this mode was attained in the writing of the *Lives of Saints*. This blending of prose and poetic linguistic and rhetorical features has long been a popular topic for medieval scholars and even the designation "rhythmical prose" has been repeatedly criticized as misleading or even inaccurate.<sup>83</sup> I will continue to

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<sup>82</sup> See, for instance, Stacy S. Klein, "Beauty and the Banquet: Queenship and Social Reform in Ælfric's 'Esther'," *JEGP* 103.1 (2004), 77-105.

<sup>83</sup> One popular alternative, championed by Norman Blake, is "rhythmical alliteration," which seems to present the style firmly in the camp of versification. John C. Pope provides the best overview when he writes that "...the term 'rhythmical prose' as applied to Ælfric's compositions must be understood to refer to a loosely metrical form resembling in basic structural principles the alliterative verse of the Old English poets, but differing markedly in character and range of its rhythms as in strictness of alliterative practice, and altogether distinct in diction, rhetoric, and tone. It is better regarded as a mildly ornamental, rhythmically ordered prose than as a debased, pedestrian poetry (*Homilies of Ælfric*, Volume 1, EETS [Oxford, OUP, 1967-8], 105). In the decades since Pope's pronouncement, debate over the proper categorization of Ælfric's innovative style has not settled the issue. Editors have long struggled with how to present Ælfric's "rhythmical prose" visually: Pope, for example, may defend the style as prose but he renders Ælfric's work in poetic lines in his editions. Assman and Skeat, the first editors to tackle Ælfric's oeuvre, prefer to use a verse format. Bruce Mitchell holds an opposing viewpoint, writing, "To me, Ælfric's alliterative prose is good prose, not bad poetry...I do not agree with [Pope's] decision to print this prose in verse" (*Old English Syntax*, Volume 2 [Oxford: OUP, 1985], 998). For his part, Lee chooses continual lineation to maintain the prose flow. Thomas Bredehoft weighed in recently *against* the prose designation: "Long misunderstood simply because it failed to fit the norms of classical verse,



use the term “rhythmical prose,” however, not because I align myself wholeheartedly with readers who classify Ælfric’s style as prose but because the other theories, while compelling and well researched, remain sufficiently untested. I do think, however, this issue raises interesting questions about the potential fracturing of the abbot’s hermeneutic self into modes such as Ælfric-as-poet, Ælfric-as-scholar, and Ælfric-as-translator. More research into the possible effects of rhythmical prose on interpretive habits is needed before anything more concrete can be suggested.

Lee identifies four features of the rhythmical prose in Esther, Judith, and the Macabees. They are: the use of 4-stress units, which can each be subdivided into two 2-stress units; the linking of the units by alliteration (either on stressed or unstressed syllables, or both), using both consonantal and vocalic emphasis; the use of word-play, i.e. repetition, or similar sounds; a clarity and smoothness that allows the carefully structured sentences to flow.<sup>84</sup> The last three features appear in Ælfric’s translation of Genesis only rudimentally and sporadically, never as part of a unified stylistic movement. Genesis is also lacking any sustained metrical stress patterns. The most logical reason for the absence of these elements in Genesis is that Ælfric simply had not developed and combined all the rhetorical, metrical, and poetic demands of his later style. He was already under the

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Ælfric’s so-called rhythmical prose is actually a clear and straightforward example of late Old English verse” (*Early English Metre* [Toronto: Toronto UP, 2005], 11). In the same book, Bredehoft also argues against placing Ælfric’s style in some sort of middle ground between prose and verse on the grounds that the abbot was both a scholar and a poet, “or, at least, a versifier” (81).

<sup>84</sup> Lee, V. 1, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~stuart/kings/main.htm>.

restrictions of his conservative translation method. The demands of rhythmical prose are already difficult enough without adding Ælfric's declaration that "we durren na mare awritan on Englisc þonne þæt Leden hæfð, ne þa endebirdnisse awendan" [we dare not to write more in English than the Latin has, nor change the order]. Translating a text with rhythmical prose requires that Ælfric make difficult choices about what gets changed, what gets retained, and what gets cut. Perhaps this is what Ælfric means in the *Libellus* when he writes of Esther that "ic awende on Englisc on ure wisan sceortlice" [I translated it in English in our way shortly]. The final phrase "ure wisan sceortlice" might refer to both the abbreviated, manipulated contents of Esther as well as Ælfric's rhythmical prose stylings.

#### **K. Ælfric's Audience for Esther**

The identity of Ælfric's audience for Esther is also up for grabs, and while there has been little substantive research into this topic, conjecture remains rampant. Clemoes does not focus on the issue of audience or genre for his chronology of the abbot's works, but he does devise some classifications that suggest his own thoughts. One of these labels is "non-liturgical narrative pieces," which he further subdivides into the Old Testament translations on one hand and *Lives of Saints* and *Vita S. Æþelwoldi* on the other.<sup>85</sup> Clemoes treats these texts as productions primarily for private reading, as in the case of Ælfric's various patrons like Wulfsgie and Sigeweard, and public reading beyond the liturgy.

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<sup>85</sup> Clemoes (2000), 214-219.

Milton McC.Gatch disagrees with Clemoes, however, and suggests that the texts labeled “non-liturgical” might have had a place in the Night Office or even as part of *lectio divina*.<sup>86</sup> *The Rule of St. Benedict* stresses the need for initiates to read and memorize as much of the Bible as possible so it would have been necessary for new monks or nuns with little or no skill in Latin to read scripture in the vernacular, even a text as marginal as Esther.

Another interpretation, however, is that Ælfric’s audience is in fact composed primarily of females. This is an attractive proposition for a few reasons. First of all, Esther is one of the strongest female leaders depicted in the Bible, and as such she would automatically stand out to female readers as a paragon. Just as Ælfric translated texts for male nobles, it would make sense that he would translate texts for their female peers. Secondly, several of the patristic fathers who translate or interpret Esther had a female audience. Jerome directs the close of his preface to Esther to two of his most famous female followers, Paula and Eustochium, a mother-daughter duo that were part of a powerful group of Roman women who patronized the patriarch in exchange for religious advice and instruction.<sup>87</sup> Augustine writes a letter to the woman Ecdicia wherein he cites

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<sup>86</sup> Milton McC.Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo- Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1977), 53.

<sup>87</sup> For more on these women, see Hans Von Campenhausen, *Men Who Shaped the Western Church*, trans. Manfred Hoffman (New York; Harper, 1964), 152-58. Here is the relevant passage from Jerome’s preface: “Vos autem, o Paula et Eustochium, quoniam et bibliothecas Hebraeorum studuistis intrare et interpretum certamina conprobastis, tenentes Hester hebraicum librum, per singula verba nostrum translationem aspicite, ut possitis agnoscere me nihil etiam augmentasse addendo, sed fideli testimonio simpliciter, sicut in hebraeo habetur, historiam hebraicam latinae linguae tradidisse. Nec affectamur laudes hominum nec vituperationes expavescimus. Deo enim

Esther in order to reprimand Ecdicia for disobeying her husband concerning an issue of dress. Augustine reminds Ecdicia that:

in the time of the patriarchs the Great Queen Esther feared God, worshipped God, and served God, yet she was submissive to her husband, a foreign king, who did not worship the same God as she did. And at a time of extreme danger not only to herself but to her race, the chosen people of God, she prostrated herself before God in prayer, and in her prayer she said that she regarded her royal attire as a menstruous rag, and God 'who seeth the heart' heard her prayer at once because he knew that she spoke the truth.<sup>88</sup>

Here, Augustine establishes Esther as an exemplar of wifely submission before her husband. In *Degratia et libero arbitrio*, Augustine invokes Esther as an agent of God and an example of how God can alter men's wills, against Pelagius, citing chapter 15:10-11: "He looked upon her with the violent indignation of a bull; the queen was frightened and her color changed through faintness; she leaned upon the

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placere curantes minas hominum penitus non timemus, quoniam 'dissipat Deus ossa eorum qui hominibus placere desiderant' et secundum Apostolum qui huius modi sunt 'servi Christi esse non possunt'" Quoted from Monachorum abbatiae pontificiae sancti Hieronymi in urbe ordinis sancti Benedicti, eds., *Biblia sacra iuxta Latinam vulgatam versionem*, vol. IX (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1951), IX, 3. [But you, oh Paula and Eustochium, since you were eager to enter into the books of the Hebrews and you have judged the struggles of the translators, holding Esther the book of the Hebrews; examine our translation by individual words, so that you might be able to declare that I have added nothing at all for embellishment; but simply by faithful testimony, I have translated the Hebrew narrative into the Latin language just as it is contained in the Hebrew. We are neither affected by the praise of men, nor do we fear their censure. Taking care to please God, we do not deeply fear the threats of men, since 'God scatters the bones of those who desire to please men,' and according to the apostle, such who are 'not able to be servants of Christ'].

<sup>88</sup> Wilfrid Parsons, trans., *Saint Augustine: Letters*, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1956), 268.

head of her maid companion who went before her. And God changed the king and turned his indignation into gentleness.”<sup>89</sup> By being submissive and fearful, Esther is able to perform her duty, another not-so-subtle reminder for Augustine’s female readers.

Before Ælfric arrives on the scene, the most prolific commentor on Esther is undoubtedly Rabanus Maurus, Bishop of Fulda, who produces the only full, extant commentary on this book of scripture in 836 CE, *Expositio in librum Esther*. Rabanus dedicates this commentary, and his commentary on Judith, to Empress Judith, wife of Louis the Pious, King of the Franks and son of Charlemagne. The empress was blamed for the events that led to hers and the king’s temporary displacement from their thrones in 833.<sup>90</sup> Rabanus had supported the leader of the revolt, Lothar, but when it became clear the rebellion was shortlived, the scholar changed his stripes, as his dedications show. In his *Expositio in librum Judith*, Rabanus addresses the empress with these words:

Concerning other things, because I have found you to excel in praiseworthy mind, and to imitate the virtues and zeal for good work of the holy women whom Scripture brings to mind, not in vain have I considered the story of certain of them...to dedicate and transmit your name, plainly Judith and Esther, one of whom is equal

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<sup>89</sup> Robert P. Russell, trans., *Saint Augustine: The Teacher, The Free Choice of Will, Grace and Free Will*, vol. 59 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 302.

<sup>90</sup> For a longer account of these events, see see Pierre Riche, *The Carolingians: A Family Who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1993), especially 145-159.

in name to you, the other in dignity. Who indeed on account of their distinguished merit of virtue are to be imitated as much by men as by women...<sup>91</sup>

In the same text, Rabanus comments, “Also Queen, always place Esther, likewise a queen, imitable in every action of piety and chastity, before the eyes of your heart, until, equalling the merit of her sanctity, you are able to climb from the earthly kingdom to the peak of the celestial kingdom.”<sup>92</sup> He adds to this assessment in his preface to the commentary of Esther, identifying her as a type of the Church and worthy of emulation by all.<sup>93</sup>

These examples would have provided Ælfric with ample precedent for presenting Esther to a specifically female readership. Even closer to home, the Old English translation of *The Benedictine Rule* in Cotton Faustina A. x was made more suitable for nuns by combing the original word by word and replacing all the nouns, pronouns, and other masculine grammatical elements with their feminine counterparts, while also occasionally modifying the content of the rule. While there is little evidence that the bishop personally made all of those changes, Mechthild Gretsch and Michael Lapidge agree that Æthelwold was likely the

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<sup>91</sup> Rabanus Maurus. *Expositio in librum Esther*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series Latina (Turnout: Brepols, 1852), vol. 109, col. 655-670. Translations of Rabanus are adapted from Timothy Alan Gustafson, “Ælfric Reads Esther: The Cultural Limits of Translation” (Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1995), 92 and 95.

<sup>92</sup> *PL.*, 541.

<sup>93</sup> *PL.*, 635. From the time of Clement of Rome, it was common for Christian writers to pair Judith and Esther; and Clement of Alexandria is credited with being the first to identify Esther as a type of the Church, a virgin bride. See, respectively, R.M. Grant and Holt H. Graham, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary*, vol. 2 (New York: Nelson, 1965), 87-88; and William Wilson, trans., *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1859), 281.

source of those changes. In the next section, I examine some of Ælfric's changes to the content of Esther to learn if there are patterns at work that fit with this assessment.

## L. Changes in Esther

In Jerome's original Vulgate, Esther runs to ten chapters, although he appends chapters 10:4–16:24 to the end, actually Greek segments of the original chapters extracted from the narrative because of Jerome's claim in his prologue that they are deuterocanonical, "found neither in the Hebrew, nor in the Chaldee [Aramaic]." <sup>94</sup> Ælfric's translation is 330 lines, a massive reduction that underscores the quantitative difference between his Genesis and Esther. But neither does the abbot *only* or *simply* omit words, lines, or passages from Esther that he feels are unsuitable for an audience of Anglo-Saxon laypersons. Here is an area where modern determinations of what counts as translation do not apply neatly to medieval practice or theory: nearly all pre-modern and contemporary translation paradigms are obsessed with types of linguistic equivalencies that medieval writers value but do not hold at the center of their task or craft. Ælfric's curious use of "awendan" and "gesettan" bears some witness to this, as does King Alfred's own use of "awendan." <sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Biblia sacra*, IX, 3.

<sup>95</sup> Janet Bately ably catalogues and analyzes the king of Wessex's use of this term in "The Literary Prose of King Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation," *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, 3–28. Early in her argument, Bately comments that Alfred's use of "awendan" "covers both translation and paraphrase," (4).

Ælfric's translation sticks close to the Vulgate's version until around line 75, with some conflations of events and omissions of lists. The first pattern of omission relates to the mention of eunuchs. In the Latin, at 1:10 and 1:14, there are lists of the eunuch wise men that advised King Assuerus but Ælfric leaves these out of his translation at lines 37 and 46 respectively. He also avoids using the term eunuch in these lines, and instead chooses "burðenas" [servants] and "witan" [councilors]. When the king announces his plan to scour the kingdom for a worthy replacement as his bed-fellow, the Vulgate includes this passage at 2:3: "et adducant eas ad civitatem Susan et tradant in domum feminarum sub manu Aegaei eunuchi qui est praepositus et custos mulierum regiarum et accipiant mundum muliebrem et cetera ad usus necessaria" [and let them bring them to the city of Susan, and put them into the house of the women under the hand of Egeus the eunuch, who is the overseer and keeper of the king's women: and let them receive women's ornaments, and other things necessary for their use], which Ælfric skips entirely. We might deduce that the abbot is avoiding extraneous sins that populate the narrative of Esther, and later omissions seem to support this view. For example, explicit references to excessive drinking are removed at 5:2 and 7:1-2, as is Esther's kissing of the king's scepter at 5:2. These are apparently not activities suitable for spiritually-minded Anglo-Saxon females, or they might serve as distractions from the more important themes of the text.

More convincing proof of the abbot's deliberate manipulation of his source for a female audience is the fact that Haman's wife Zares is effaced from Esther



completely, and although she is not a major character by any means, it is curious that the abbot chose to leave in other minor persons. In the Vulgate, she is mentioned at 4:9-14, when Haman has been confronted by Mordecai and former retreats to “se amicos et Zares uxorem suam” [his friends and Zares, his wife], who, after they hear of Haman’s trials, “responderuntque ei Zares uxor eius et ceteri amici” [his wife Zares and his other friends answered him]. Ælfric simply writes “to his cnihtum” (162) for the first instance, and “his magas” (168) for the second. While he had very little to work with as regards Zares, Ælfric also has no real reason to retain other characters such as the king’s advisors and Haman’s sons, yet they still have a place in his translation. However, when this erasure is considered in light of the possibility of a female audience, it makes sense that Ælfric would want to do away with a negative female presence in the story that might detract from the positive example offered by Esther.

The other female figure in the story, besides the titular heroine, is Vashti, the pagan king’s former love. “Central” is, however, somewhat hyperbolic since she is mentioned only briefly at the beginning. The Vulgate introduces her at 1:9: “Vasthi quoque regina fecit convivium feminarum in palatio ubi rex Asuerus manere consueverat” [Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the palace, where king Assuerus was used to dwell]. Ælfric makes some significant additions when he gets to these lines in his translation, writing at lines 24-28, “His cwen hatte Vasthi, seo wæs swiðe wlitig. Heo worhte eac feorme mid fulre mærdæ eallum þam wifmannum þe heo wolde habban to hire mærpæ, on þam mæran

*palente þær þær se cyning wæs oftost wunigende*” [His queen was named Vashti, she was very beautiful. She prepared also a banquet with great glory for all the women whom she wanted to have for her glory, in that splendid palace there where the king was most often dwelling]. There is no origin in the Latin for “*seo wæs swiðe wlitig,*” “*mid fulre mærdæ,*” or “*þe heo wolde habban to hire mærþe, on þam mæran palente.*” Ælfric’s insertions here serve to enhance the queen’s beauty and her desire for glory, marking her even more as a foil for Esther, who is later described with the same phrase, “*swiðe wlitig.*” In the Latin version, there is so little information about Vashti that it is hard for readers to know how to interpret her: she is defined in relation to her great beauty but she enters and leaves the story so quickly that she is forgotten. By amplifying her sensuousness and making her more arrogant, Ælfric makes it clear for his audience that Esther’s beauty is more than skin deep. It is a gift from God that is matched only by her devotion to her moral, Christian duty. This is suggested by the fact that both women hold banquets but Vashti invites only women, implying that she wants to show off her beauty to her peers while excluding the king. Meanwhile, Esther uses her feast in chapter 7 to get closer to the king and request his aid against Haman. Ælfric’s subtle manipulation of his source here is a substitute for the interpretive asides he includes in Genesis. The literal method he employed in that early translation kept him – often but not always – from making outright changes to scripture so the abbot instead interwove his exegetical commentary when appropriate.

Another difference between Vashti and Esther is their obedience: Vashti is not only seductively beautiful and hungry for recognition; she is also stubbornly disobedient of her husband and king's command. In the Vulgate, at 1:11-12, readers learn the king commanded his eunuchs "ut introducerent reginam Vasthi coram rege posito super caput eius diademate et ostenderet cunctis populis et principibus illius pulchritudinem erat enim pulchra valde quae rennuit et ad regis imperium" [To bring in queen Vasthi before the king, with the crown set upon her head, to show her beauty to all the people and the princes: for she was exceeding beautiful. But she refused, and would not come at the king's commandment]. In his translation, lines 30-37, Ælfric writes that the king ordered his "servants":

þæt hi sceoldon gefeccan þa cwene Vasthi, þæt heo come to him mid hire cynehelme (swa swa heora seode wæs þæt seo cwen werode cynehelm on heafode); 7 he wolde æteowian hire wlite his þegnum, forþan þe heo wæs swiþe wlitig on hiwe. Þa eodon þa burðenas 7 abudon þære cwene þæs cyninges hæse, ac heo hit forsoc 7 nolde gehersumian him to his willan.

that they should fetch Queen Vashti, so that she might come to him with her royal crown: thus was her custom, that the queen wore the royal crown on her head. And he wanted to display her beauty to his retainers, because she was very beautiful in appearance. Then the servants went and announced to the queen the command of the king. But she objected to it and did not want to obey him in his desire.

Ælfric has expanded on the Latin's offering in this passage as well. His first insertion is "swa swa heora seode wæs þæt seo cwen werode cynehelm on heafode," which develops the queen's vice of seeking glory. The original wording suggests that it was wholly the king's idea for Vashti to come before him in her symbols of power, power that she only has through him, it should be remembered, which just aggravates her disdain for his commands. Ælfric's translation firmly reorients this line and places the blame on the queen and her hunger for glory. Gone as well is the possibility that the king actually wanted Vashti to come wearing *only* her crown, which some early rabbinic hermeneuts had suggested as an alternate reading which would thereby excuse the queen from any wrongdoing.<sup>96</sup> Ælfric needs Vashti to be clearly evil, to better heighten the laudable qualities represented by Esther.

What is it that the characters in Esther find to be so offensive about Vashti's denial of the king, however? In the Vulgate, 1:16-18, the king's counselors declare:

non solum regem laesit regina Vasthi sed omnes principes et  
 populos qui sunt in cunctis provinciis regis Asueri egredietur enim  
 sermo reginae ad omnes mulieres ut contemnant viros suos et dicant  
 rex Asuerus iussit ut regina Vasthi intraret ad eum et illa noluit  
 atque hoc exemplo omnes principum coniuges Persarum atque  
 Medorum parvipendent imperia maritorum unde regis iusta est

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<sup>96</sup> For more on this tradition of thought, see Jo Carruthers, *Esther Through the Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 62.

indignation.

Queen Vasthi hath not only injured the king, but also all the people and princes that are in all the provinces of king Assuerus. For this deed of the queen will go abroad to all women, so that they will despise their husbands, and will say: King Assuerus commanded that queen Vasthi should come in to him, and she would not. And by this example all the wives of the princes of the Persians and the Medes will slight the commandments of their husbands: wherefore the king's indignation is just.

The worry is a gendered one, that this single example of a disobedient wife will incite an avalanche of feminine resistance across the whole kingdom. Ælfric's translation is true to his source at lines 43-49, with a slight exception:

Seo cwen witodlice, þe þin word forseah, leof, ne unwurðode na þe ænne mid þan, ac ealle þine ealdormenn 7 eac þine þegnas! Ðonne ure wif geaxiað be þisum wordum æt ham, hu seo cwen forseah hire cynehlaford, þonne willað hi eac us eallswa forseon! Þonne beoð ealle Medas micclum forsewene 7 þa Pærsican leoda swa us na ne licað.

The queen, certainly, who refused your word, sir, has dishonored not only you by that, but all your noblemen and also your retainers. When our wives hear of these words at home, how the queen refused her royal lord, then they also will want thus to refuse all of

us; then all Medians will be very contemptible, and the Persian people, as is not at all pleasing to us.

Clearly the worry is the same in the vernacular version, although in this instance the abbot has narrowed the scope of his masculine character's fear of the female by leaving out the Vulgate's insistence that "*enim sermo reginae ad omnes mulieres.*" In the previous passage introducing Vasthi, however, Ælfric has added a seemingly innocuous clause that introduces the possibility of a female community apart from and against the dominant male paradigm. When discussing the feast, Ælfric inserts that the queen had invited "*eallum þam wifmannum,*" a detail not present in the Vulgate but one that clearly positions Vasthi as the matriarch of her own type of court. This addition might help make the advisors' fears of an empire-wide rebellion more plausible. It also influences a reading of the king's command that the queen enter into his presence: he is not asking for a visit from her so much as pointedly trying to remove her from her own seat of power amidst the women under her influence.

The abbot makes one final addition to the negative characterization of Vasthi in his translation. At the end of his rendering of the first book of Esther, at lines 57-58, Ælfric appends the statement "*7 Vasthi geseah þa þæt heo forsewen wæs*" [and Vasthi saw then that she was dishonored]. This clause has no origin in the Vulgate and is more evidence of Ælfric's desire to guide his audience's interpretation of this character. In scripture, despite Vasthi's punishment, there is no indication that she recognizes her sins: she remains disobedient to the very end,

unbent by the king's rage. Ælfric felt that it was better for his readers if the queen is fleshed out and given a more prominent role.

The only remaining female is Esther herself, and even her characterization does not go unscathed in the process of being translated into the vernacular. Of course she is a virgin, and as one scholar states, "[t]he virgin of hagiography is by definition physically beautiful; she must be in order to arouse the interest of idolatrous and lecherous suitors."<sup>97</sup> Esther is not a hagiographical text but that genre is among the most popular and common in Anglo-Saxon England, as the abbot's own *Lives of Saints* bears witness. Since Ælfric's goal is to educate and not alienate his audience, he must rely on what contextual knowledge they do possess in order to maximize the effectiveness of his translation. He manages to heighten Vasthi's physical beauty to emphasize the risk of self-centered glory-seeking; with Esther, beauty is instead an extension of her virginal status and a symbol of her purity.

When the heroine is introduced in the story, at 2:7, Ælfric deviates from the Vulgate in a number of ways. Here are the relevant lines, 67-72:

[Mardocheus] mid him hæfde his broðor dohtor. Seo hatte Ester,  
wlitig mædenmann on wundorlicre fægernysse, 7 he hi geforðode on  
fægerum þeawum, æfter Godes æ 7 his ege symle, 7 hæfde hi for  
dohtor, forðan þe hire dead wæs ge fæder ge moder, þa þa heo  
unmaga wæs.

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<sup>97</sup> Gustafson, 251.

[Mordecai] with him had his brother's daughter. She was named Esther, a beautiful maiden of wonderful fairness, and he her furthered in fair virtues according to God's law and fear of him always, and he had her as a daughter, because her father and mother were dead, and so she an orphan was.

First, he omits the confusing second name Edissa that is in the Vulgate;<sup>98</sup> next, he departs from the order of the information presented in the original by placing Esther's beauty front and center and delaying the announcement that she is an orphan to the end of the introduction. Ælfric omits the entirety of 2:12-15, lines that detail the activities of the harem and preparation for a virgin to be with the king. Ælfric avoids this episode because these elements of the original narrative create too strong of a positive parallel between Vasthi and Esther: the harem scene is an extended look at the heroine's beauty regime and it contains many incidents of polygamy. Ælfric certainly would not want to provide his audience with more examples of sin than necessary, and by skipping over the lines that focus on Esther's pampering and preparation, he can preserve her characterization as that of a morally and physically pure foil to Vasthi. He initiates this scheme even earlier, when he inserts these lines, "7 he hi geforðode on fægerum þeawum, æfter Godes æ 7 his ege symle." Notice the repetitive use of "fæger" in the lines above as well, with Ælfric using the term for physical and spiritual description. This

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<sup>98</sup> The Vulgate includes this line: "Edessae quae altero nomine Hester vocabatur" [Edissa, who by another name was called Esther].



resembles how the abbot uses “mær” to refer to both the physical trappings of Vasthi’s feast and the personal, ineffable glory she seeks by holding said feast. The abbot later adds two other details that inflate Esther’s beauty: “fægra nebwlite” [fair face] at line 74 and “7 on wæstme cyrten” [and comely in stature] at line 82, which has no coincidence in the original and is a repetition of the sentiments expressed early in her introduction, “Heo wæs swiðe wlitig on wundorlicre gefægernysse.”

Ælfric’s introduction also emphasizes Esther’s devotion to God and the Law more than in the Vulgate, further widening the gap between her and Vasthi and foreshadowing her ultimate surrendering to the will of God. The abbot includes many insertions throughout his translation that heighten the heroine’s spiritual and religious features. In chapter 4 of the Vulgate, Mordecai laments the threatening wrath of Haman against the Jews and communicates with Esther only through intermediaries, reminding her that despite her new station as queen she is a Jew and she is in just as much danger. Ælfric omits nearly all of these events from his translations but he summarizes at lines 139-47, with embellishments of his own:

Mardocheus þa micclum wearð geangsumod, 7 for his agenum  
magum get micele swiðor þonne for him selfum, 7 gesæde hit þære  
cwene; bæd þæt heo gehulpe hire mægðe 7 hire, þæt hi ealle ne  
wurdon to swilcere wæfersyne. Þa bebead seo cwen þæt hire cynn  
eall sceolde fæstan þreo dagas on an 7 Godes fultum biddan, 7 heo

sylf eallswa eac swylce fæste, biddende æt Gode þæt he geburge  
þam folce 7 eallum þam manncynne on swa micelre frecednesse.

Then Mordecai became very angry and more on account of his own  
kin wept than for himself, and told it to the queen, asking that she  
help her kin and herself so that they all not be destroyed in such a  
spectacle. Then bade the queen that her kin all should fast for three  
days and ask God's help, and likewise she herself would fast,  
praying to God that he deliver that people and all mankind from this  
great danger.

Ælfric has Mordecai and Esther communicate directly, although in the original  
they exchange words through servants. The result of this change is to make Esther  
more involved in the lives of her family and people than she appears in the  
Vulgate, holed up in her new castle with a cadre of eunuchs to do her bidding.  
And while Esther instructed her kin to fast and pray at 4:16 in the Vulgate,  
nowhere is there mention of herself praying.<sup>99</sup> It is a small enough adjustment on  
Ælfric's part but it adds to his pattern of emphasizing Esther's spirituality.

Ælfric's next major manipulation of his Vulgate source comes at the close of  
the book. He does not translate the original conclusion but adds one of his own. At  
lines 265-79, the abbot writes that Esther saved her people:

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<sup>99</sup> "Vade et congrega omnes Iudaeos quos in Susis reppereris et orate pro me non comedatis et non  
bibatis tribus diebus ac noctibus et ego cum ancillis meis similiter ieiunabo" [Go, and gather  
together all the Jews whom thou shalt find in Susan, and pray ye for me. Neither eat nor drink for  
three days and three nights: and I with my handmaids will fast in like manner].

þurh hire drihtnes fultum þe heo on gelyfde on Abrahames wisan.

Þa Iudeiscan eac wundorlice blissodon, þæt hi swilcne forespræcan  
him afunden hæfdon, 7 heoldon þa Godes æ þæs þe glædlicor æfter  
Moyses wissunge þæs mæran heretogan.

through her Lord's help, whom she believed in Abraham's manner.

The Jews also wondrously rejoiced that they such a defender for  
themselves had found, and held God's law more gladly after the  
teachings of Moses the glorious leader.

Nowhere in the Vulgate is there a recognition of Moses' role in the fates of the  
Jews, and nor do the Jews praise Esther directly. Instead, their singing and  
dancing is in response to the king's actions, not the queen's. This is the case at  
8:15-17: "omnisque civitas exultavit atque laetata est. Iudaeis autem nova lux oriri  
visa est gaudium honor et tripudium. Apud omnes populos urbes atque  
provincias quocumque regis iussa veniebant mira exultatio epulae atque convivia  
et festus dies" [And all the city rejoiced, and was glad. But to the Jews, a new light  
seemed to rise, joy, honour, and dancing. And in all peoples, cities, and provinces,  
whithersoever the king's commandments came, there was wonderful rejoicing,  
feasts and banquets, and keeping holy day]. Just a few lines later, lines 272-74,  
again departing from the original narrative, Ælfric reminds his readers "7 se  
cyning wearð gerihtlæht þurh þære cwene geleafan Gode to wurðmynte þe ealle  
þing gewylt" [And the king was guided through the queen's faith to worship God,  
who all things rules]. These changes effect a significant bolstering of Esther's piety,

transforming her from a somewhat mysterious, marginalized female character into a brave, beautiful, and fervently religious near-martyr. Like Vasthi, she is physically attractive and although this is what allowed both women to gain their place as queen, unlike the title's former holder, Esther prostrates herself before God and husband to beg for help. Ælfric's alterations of Esther's role in the narrative of this biblical story make her into the perfect wife and the perfect believer. In the Vulgate, Esther is already suitable role model for an audience of Anglo-Saxon women, but in the Old English translation she is elevated into an exemplar for feminine behavior, at once desirable and moral.

## **M. Conclusion**

There are many other omissions, additions, and outright changes in Ælfric's vernacular rendering of Esther that I could point to as proof of the abbot's practice but the patterns and instances I have presented provide the necessary perspective. By contemporary standards, the target text created by the Benedictine scholar is not a translation but an adaptation, at best. Hence its relegation to the margins with the label of "paraphrase." However, this pronouncement grossly underestimates Ælfric's skill and self-awareness, not to mention his understanding of the task of biblical translation in Anglo-Saxon England. There is a progression from the conservative, traditional translation of Genesis to the brazenly manipulative rendering of Esther, and scholars can see in the *Prefatio* that Ælfric had already decided that word-for-word translation was, in his own words, "swiðe pleolic" [extremely perilous]. In the *Libellus*, the venerable abbot is

content to recommend all of his translations to Sigeweard as stable, orthodox renderings of scripture into the vernacular. Translation is still dangerous but in the later years of his life Ælfric defends his products not by claiming he adhered as loyally as possible to his source text; no, he clings instead all the more resolutely to his faith that God is speaking through him, and that it is infinitely better to attempt to spread the Word to the unlearned through vernacular translations than to let knowledge of holy scripture die among Anglo-Saxon populations.

Alfred and Æþelwold share, to a certain extent, this understanding of the essential undertaking that is translation in Anglo-Saxon England, but their methods and limitations set them apart. The king of Wessex struggled to understand his source texts at the same time that he attempted to render them in the common tongue for his people. Readers are exposed not just to Gregory's or Boethius's or Augustine's thoughts, but to Alfred's somewhat amateur ruminations on those thoughts. As laudable as his goals were, the king's acts of translation bear markers of his knowledge gaps. Æþelwold's vernacular translatology betrays no such ignorance: instead, readers are in the hands of an expert scholar and consummate politician. And despite his pedagogical intentions, the bishop of Winchester cannot help but let his erudition, in the form of his hermeneutical prose, guide his writing. Ælfric possesses the knowledge of Æþelwold but moves beyond his teacher in both genre and style. There are no biblical translations that bear Æþelwold's name – although it is

almost certain that he undertook such projects at some point throughout his long life – while Ælfric left behind a corpus of vernacular translations. Readers can trace in those many renderings Ælfric’s evolution from a young monk who clings to the conservative, if paradoxical, translation doctrines of the patristic fathers to a venerable ecclesiastical powerhouse who does not shy away from channeling scriptural meaning into peculiarly Anglo-Saxon linguistic structures that alter both the naked narrative and spiritual sense. Ælfric is far from “more of the same”: he is a culmination of centuries of English hermeneutical innovation and a worthy standard-bearer for the vernacular at the end of the early medieval period.

## Conclusion

“‘To translate,’ in the generally accepted sense of ‘passing from one language to another,’ derives from a relatively late French adaptation of the Latin verb *traducere*, which means literally ‘to lead across’ and whose application is both more general and vaguer than translation itself. We do well to keep in mind this initial, indefinite vagueness attached to the verbs we translate as the verb ‘to translate,’ verbs that always also designate something additional or something other than the passage from one language to another.”

*Dictionary of Untranslatables*

The preceding chapters have shown that the translation theories and practices of Alfred, Ælfric, and Ælfric are the products of patristic interpretive legacies and a drive for vernacular improvement. Far from being a site of unthinking adherence to orthodoxy, Anglo-Saxon England witnessed the burgeoning of new views of what translation could accomplish, vital at a time when the vernacular was struggling to assert itself. Through a combination of linguistic change and interpretive manipulation, Old English translators adopted methodologies that elude the commonplace, outmoded binary of word-for-word and sense-for-sense. While most medieval specialists are aware that several centuries’ worth of translation activity cannot be reduced to such overly generalized extremes, there is little scholarship that pushes beyond traditional queries or that concerns itself with engaging translation studies. Nor is there sufficient research into translators or translations that scholars in earlier generations marked as troublesome or too marginal to be of concern for formulating holistic interpretations. Thus, for example, while there are single-volume investigations of Alfred’s *Consolation* and *Pastoral Care*, there is relatively

little critical engagement with the *Psalms*, or Ælfric's *Rule of St. Benedict*. Understanding of Old English translation and interpretation might always be incomplete because Anglo-Saxon specialists are limited by the corpus of vernacular texts. On the other hand, translation scholars are currently curtailed by a critical tradition that has continually undervalued Old English. In response to these restrictions, however, I have striven in this project to indicate ways to expand on and renew interest in the translation habits of Old English writers and their essential role in Western translation and hermeneutics.

King Alfred may not immediately seem to be a figure in Old English translation that has been marginalized but I have examined aspects of his translation achievements that remain relatively unexplored. What Alfred lacked in formal education, he made up for with vision, audacity, and a desire to improve intellectual culture in England. Translation was as much a process of personal as civic edification for the king of Wessex, evinced by his compensatory methods and didactic interjections in the *Psalms*. Rather than re-evaluating well-trodden ground, I have indicated how this more idiosyncratic translation provides evidence of Alfred's skill and originality. The king displays impressive technical craft by using doubling, alliteration, rhythm, and meter, but the true sign of his talent is the replacement of difficult or foreign references with more familiar ones. Successful substitution of legends and idioms requires a mastery of literary and cultural understanding that some critics still deny Alfred. Regardless of his and Old English's limitations, the king strove to communicate an intellectual heritage



to Anglo-Saxon people in the trappings of their own tongue, their own metaphors, and their own cultural history.<sup>100</sup>

Æpelwold might not have inherited the king's political power, but the bishop of Winchester possessed his own authority, as well as the benefits of formal scholarly training. His enterprise was the Benedictine Reform movement, which saw the overhaul of English monasticism as an attempt, like Alfred's translations, to return their culture to a golden age of knowledge and spiritual understanding. Unlike King Alfred and Æpelwold's successor, Ælfric, the bishop has not left behind an expansive cache of translated texts to better allow scholars to trace the development of his translation habits. Despite its singular nature, Æpelwold's Old English *Rule of St. Benedict* is the most neglected translation included in my study. Stanton attempted to "fill...a gap in the rewriting of the history of translation," his overview mentions the bishop only twice – in relation to the Benedictine Reform and Ælfric – and never refers to his edition of the *Rule*, one of the most significant vernacular renderings between Alfred and Ælfric.<sup>101</sup> Such treatment is representative, not corrective, of generally dismissive attitudes towards Æpelwold's contributions, and this failure to engage with the specifics of the bishop's methodology has led to almost complete marginalization in local and global translation histories. Without more specialist research, it is unlikely that non-specialists will suddenly decide the little-known bishop of Winchester

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<sup>100</sup> Malcolm Godden is the most significant scholar to make these sort of claims, in "Did King Alfred Write Anything?", *Medium Aevum* 76.1 (2007), 1-23.

<sup>101</sup> Stanton, 1.

deserves a seat at the table. I was unable to locate a single anthology or handbook on translation studies that includes Æþelwold, and neither is he in Mona Baker's *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* or the recent, exhaustive encyclopedic undertaking entitled *Übersetzung. Translation. Traduction*.<sup>102</sup> My chapter was only able to gesture at the sophistication of the Benedictine leader's rendering strategies by outlining his integration of the hermeneutic style with more traditional uses of doubling, alliteration, and word play. Nonetheless, it is clear that the bishop is essential both as an intermediary figure within the Anglo-Saxon period and as a skilled vernacular translator in his own right.

I cannot claim that Ælfric has been marginalized to the same extent as his teacher: the abbot of Eynsham and King Alfred have long been considered the most important named translators in Anglo-Saxon England. Stanton, supported by the work of many other scholars, views Ælfric as the natural inheritor of Alfred's translation legacy, claiming the bishop "was able to achieve several of Alfred's goals more fully than the king himself had done."<sup>103</sup> What is most obviously lost in this interpretation is Æþelwold's influence on Ælfric, which in a practical sense was more formative for the young monk than the works and ideas of a long-dead, self-taught monarch. Eliding over Æþelwold inflates Ælfric's role in the linguistic advancements made during the Benedictine reform. When Alfred and Ælfric are

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<sup>102</sup> *Übersetzung - Translation - Traduction: Ein internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung / An International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies / Encyclopédie internationale de la recherche sur la traduction*, Eds. Harald Kittel, et al., (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Stanton, 8.

considered together, it is impossible *not* to praise the abbot's skill with language and rhetoric as more advanced than the king's. Another downside of the tendency to crown Ælfric as the apex of Old English translation is the subtle yet pervasive critical homogenization of his own evolution as a translator. As I showed in chapter 3, Ælfric's practice of translation changed dramatically throughout his long career, advancing from the literal, more idealistic rendering of Genesis to the very free version of Esther. While some scholars acknowledge that the abbot likely used different terms for different styles of translation, I was unable to locate a single study that places comparative translation analyses alongside interpretations of prefatory explanations to track and contextualize Ælfric's methodological development over time. With this approach, not only am I able to reveal stylistic links and schisms between Ælfric and Æþelwold, but also I provide insight into the former Benedictine's transformation from a conservative monk to a confident abbot.

Not quite patristic, yet not wholly original, Old English translatology has been hard to define or categorize and disciplinary disagreements over jargon have, I fear, distracted readers from both the specifics of Old English translation and its broader implications within the historical scheme of translation and interpretation in Western culture. Stanton shows an awareness of the dangers of semantic obfuscation when he spends several pages in the introduction to *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* defining exactly what he means by "translation" and why he has chosen that particular connotation over the many

others available. Translation specialists outside medieval studies have misunderstood Anglo-Saxon translators and mistakenly assumed that because “the many centuries between classical antiquity and the eighteenth century should be regarded as a unit which is cemented by a strong tradition,” there is little reason to pay closer attention to such a sparsely populated textual landscape when there are more obvious and more accessible examples of English translation just a few centuries down the line.<sup>104</sup>

One reason for consternation over semantics is the resistance of early medieval translation to the standard theoretical paradigms that have proliferated particularly since the nineteenth century. Many contemporary models of translation are obsessed with idealism or the pursuit of perfect equivalence. Willis Barnstone calls these arguments “purist,” and he describes their axioms as: “Perfect replication in translation is desirable, but perfect replication is impossible. Hence translation itself is impossible.”<sup>105</sup> The most influential advocate of the perfectionist perspective is Walter Benjamin, whose essay “The Task of the Translator” elevates literalism in translation by claiming extreme word-for-word adherence could potentially lead to the recreation of a pure language. However, it also leads to pure unintelligibility. While Anglo-Saxon writers were aware of the many risks inherent to translation acts, they would not have characterized translation itself as impossible; neither would they have viewed their own efforts

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<sup>104</sup> Frederick Renner, *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi, 1989), 7.

<sup>105</sup> *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 16.

as ultimately futile, misguided, or erroneous. Witness Ælfric in the *Libellus* reminding readers of his many scriptural translations, offering them up as a reliable canon. Benjamin's vision itself was inspired by the practice of medieval glossing and near the close of his seminal essay the German philosopher declares, "The interlinear version of the scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation."<sup>106</sup> Whereas Benjamin viewed scripture as "unconditionally translatable, no longer for its own sake, but solely for that of the languages," all the Anglo-Saxon writers I examined for this project prioritized content over form, function over equivalence.<sup>107</sup> Confidence in this hierarchy freed them to make whatever changes deemed necessary, even if those changes violated a library's worth of precedent, as long as the translators were acting in the best, didactic interest of the people – all in God's name, of course. The faith factor contributes to Old English translation's defiance in the face of prescriptive attempts at categorization, which is why I have adopted a descriptive perspective.

Even my use of "translatology" implies a scientific sense of unity and uniformity that does not seem to be reflected in the divergent habits of the three figures I have discussed, not to mention the hundreds of other, anonymous translators and hermeneuts who contributed to the corpus of vernacular English. Debates over the meanings of terms like "awendan," "areccan," "gesettan," and "wealhstod" strongly suggest that Anglo-Saxons had a rich lexicon to support

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<sup>106</sup> "The Task of the Translator," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 1913-1926, Volume 1*, Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2002),

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

their multi-faceted understanding of translation, interpretation, and the role of the translator. Yet before the rise of formal translation studies, which is usually given the date of 1958, the discussion of translation was not separated from acts of translation.<sup>108</sup> There were no translation theorists in Anglo-Saxon England, just translators who sometimes attempted to define and defend their goals and methods. On these grounds, I might argue that translatology more accurately labels the nexus of cultural, linguistic, and theological translation concerns that were fermenting in early medieval England than translation studies, which, at least semantically, delimits much narrower boundaries. Translatology is a grecolatin metaterm that combines “translation” with “the study and knowledge of,” indicating critical attention to both theorization about and practice of translation. The French equivalent is “traductology,” a term that has come to replace “translation studies” in research by scholars working in Romance languages. Douglas Robinson defines it as “the *logos* about translation, the logical confines into which translation in the West is to be normatively fitted.”<sup>109</sup> He goes on to insist “the ‘science’ of translation that feels to us like a science because it is logical and normative...begins definitively not in classical but in Christian

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<sup>108</sup> 1958 saw two particularly notable events in translation: Second Congress of Slavists met in Moscow and decided that neither literary nor linguistic approaches were sufficient for studying translation and that the field needed its own science; and Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet published their seminal study, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*.

<sup>109</sup> Douglas Robinson, “The Ascetic Foundations of Western Translatology: Jerome and Augustine,” *Translation and Literature* 1 (1992), 3.

antiquity.”<sup>110</sup> Translatology in the Christian world is a branch of theology, the protecting and policing of knowledge of the Holy Word. Translation, especially of scripture, was about much more than merely rendering a source text readable for a target audience: sociological, political, cultural, spiritual, and personal elements were at play when any scribe or scholar put pen to paper. Patristic figures, particularly Augustine, knew this and revolutionized translation by establishing and exerting dogmatic control over translation methods and translators themselves. Roman practitioners such as Horace and Cicero were never able to unify their concerns enough to produce a recognizable methodology for translation, but the Church could not allow any gray areas in matters of interpretation. Asceticism played a pivotal role in erecting bastions of intellectual and spiritual authority that preserved the “best” aspects of classical civilized culture, including patristic translation and hermeneutic doctrines.

In his phenomenal study, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, Geoffrey Harpham argues that the “ascetic imperative... [is] a primary, transcultural structuring force,”<sup>111</sup> referring “not only to a particular set of beliefs and practices that erupted into high visibility during the early Christian era, but also to certain features of our own culture, features that have survived the loss of

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., xiii.

the ideological and theological structure within which they emerged."<sup>112</sup> Harpham argues that while asceticism

can plausibly 'cover' early Christianity, the concept of asceticism exceeds the ideological limitations of that culture; it may best be considered as sub-ideological, common to all culture. In this large sense, asceticism is the "cultural" element in culture; it makes cultures comparable, and is therefore one way of describing the common feature that permits communication or understanding between cultures. .... Where there is culture there is asceticism: cultures structure asceticism, each in its own way, but do not impose it.<sup>113</sup>

Harpham traces the ascetic imperative from the fourth century *Life of St. Anthony* by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, to Augustine's *Confessions*, then Matthias Grunewald's *Isenheim Altar* in the sixteenth century, and from there to Nietzsche's and Foucault's responses to asceticism with their respective theories of power and the body. Harpham concludes his investigation with a "polemical" claim that "interpretation theory, alternating between modes of formalism and subjectivism, is structurally and permanently an ascetic undertaking."<sup>114</sup> Despite the profundity and relevancy of Harpham's analyses for a wealth of fields, his research in this area remains curiously untouched. It is not avoided completely, or even

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., xvii.



denigrated, by medievalists, but the fluid movement of Harpham's discourse from patristic theologians to modern hermeneutic philosophers and back again is part of a critical mode that has little appeal to a substantial cohort of medieval scholars. We might summarize their objections by updating Alcuin's famous question – "What has Ingeld to do with Christ?" – to ask instead "What has Derrida to do with Augustine?" However, far from surrendering to anachronism, Harpham is arguing that asceticism transcends historical, linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries and by investigating its appearances in various forms throughout human history, he gives it "a certain historical density" and "suggest[s] an often ignored historical depth to contemporary thought."<sup>115</sup>

Robinson uses Harpham's work to offer an original analysis of the competing translation theories of Jerome and Augustine, pronouncing that "The history of Western translatology is many things, but above all it is a history of ascetic discipline."<sup>116</sup> Moving forward, I am confident that Anglo-Saxon specialists can engage with Harpham and Robinson to achieve a reconsideration and repositioning of Old English translation activity. According to these two scholars, translation in the West is a continuum between the divergent ascetics of eremitic Jerome and cenobitic Augustine. Augustine's ideal translator resembles the perfect cenobite, who, in shedding personal control for discipline, is "faultless rather than

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>116</sup> Robinson (1992), 6.

excellent, a subtracted rather than achieved self.”<sup>117</sup> The cenobite piously submits to orthodoxy, made physical in the confines of a monastic institution, as they submit to the intention of the source text as interpreted by ecclesiastical superiors. In contrast, by retreating alone – archetypally into the desert – the eremite attempts to restrain temptation through exclusion and self-control, a mastery of the self rather than submission to a community. In translation, this manifests as pursuing a transcendent meaning that reveals itself to the venerable eremite who has long resided alone in the pursuit of just such arcane knowledge. Jerome was a practicing translator so his “theory” is more ad hoc in response to his task of creating the Vulgate; Augustine’s “theory” is systematic, a by-product of his semiotics rather than a natural development out of translation practice. Augustine created a set of standards as a guide while Jerome believed actual translation does not allow for such rigidity. Jerome argues for word-for-word translation when dealing with the mystery of scripture but he deviates from this parameter whenever he chooses because he believes he sees more than other translators.<sup>118</sup> The cenobitic ideal of translator as “subtracted self” assumes that the writer in question lacks the necessary knowledge to make choices about the “sense” of the

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<sup>117</sup> Harpham, 28.

<sup>118</sup> “Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera voce profiteor, me in interpretatione Graecorum, absque Scripturis sanctis, ubi et verborum ordo mysterium est, non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu” [For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word]. Quoted in the original Latin from *CSEL* 54, 508; English translation is from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 6. Ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W.G. Martley, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893.), Letter 57, paragraph 5.

source text; Jerome's ideal translator is the "dramatized self," catapulted into a position of authority because of specialized skills and, of course, personalized divine dispensation. After the oft-quoted and recognizably knee-jerk defense of word-for-word translation, the bulk of Jerome's *Letter to Pammachius* is devoted to close-reading and identifying errors and radical interpretations in the text of Greek Septuagint and the writings of the evangelists, targeting instances when these authorities chose sense-for-sense over word-for-word. In one particularly strident passage on Matthew's failings, Jerome writes

They may accuse the apostle of falsifying his version seeing that it agrees neither with the Hebrew nor with the translators of the Septuagint: and worse than this, they may say that he has mistaken the author's name putting down Jeremiah when it should be Zechariah. Far be it from us to speak thus of a follow of Christ, who made it his care to formulate dogmas rather than to hunt for words and syllables.<sup>119</sup>

The cumulative effect of these and many other citations is a resounding resistance to cenobitic discipline and praise for sense-for-sense translation when wielded by suitably authoritative and divinely inspired writers

Augustine, however, refused to put his faith in the same fallible humans whose language God fractured at Babel. His ideal "was a monk in a cell, purified of personality, perfectly conformed to cenobitic rule, wholly spoken from within

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., paragraph 7.

by the voice of God.”<sup>120</sup> The perfect example of cenobistic translatology, for Augustine, is the subordination of seventy-two individual monastic translators to the singular Word for the creation of the Greek Septuagint. He writes in *De doctrina christiana*:

To correct any Latin manuscripts Greek ones should be used: among these, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, the authority of the Septuagint is supreme. Its seventy writers are now claimed in all the more informed churches to have performed their task of translation with such strong guidance from the Holy Spirit that this great number of men spoke with but a single voice. If, as is generally held, and indeed asserted by many who are not unworthy of belief, each one of these wrote his translation alone in an individual cell and nothing was found in anyone's version which was not found, in the same words and the same order of words, in the others, who would dare to adapt such an authoritative work, let alone adopt anything in preference to it? But if in fact they joined forces so as to achieve unanimity by open discussion and joint decision, even so it would not be right or proper for any one person, however expert, to think of correcting a version agreed by so many experienced scholars. Therefore, even if we find in the Hebrew versions something that

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<sup>120</sup> Robinson (1992), 16

differs from what they wrote, I believe that we should defer to the divine dispensation which was made through them.<sup>121</sup>

Augustine admits he prefers the Greek translation over the Hebrew originals, which is also a preference for the political “consensus” of patriarchal authority over original inspiration. Following suit, cenobitic translatology values normative renderings that rely on ecclesiastical dogma rather than, for example, the hodge-podge of unknown authors, prophets, and scribes involved with the copying of the Hebrew Old Testament. Contemporary translation similarly encourages – even demands – that the translator empty him- or herself before interacting with the source text to better allow a neutral transfer of meaning across linguistic and cultural barriers. This is the case for Benjamin, who insists “True translation is transparent” and that this transparency is only attainable by loyal word-for-word methods. It is also the source of the contemporary belief that a “good” translation is one that blends in to the literary culture of its target audience. Likewise, a “good” translator is humble and, hopefully, self-effacing, just as Ælfric is in his *Prefatio*.

Robinson’s argument somewhat polarizes the translation methods of Jerome and Augustine but there is substantial overlap, as he himself elucidates:

...Augustine and Jerome do formulate a more or less coherent translatalogical ‘core’ or ‘centre’ that will organize all later

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<sup>121</sup> The Latin and English translation are both from *De doctrina christiana*, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 80-81.

translation theory into an ascetic tradition. Both insist that the source-language text be reduced to (or conceived as) its transcendental 'meaning,' an abstract semantic content stripped of all 'carnal' specificity (the feel or colour of words, word order) that can be transferred without change to a target language. .... Both teach the translator piety toward the source-language text and submission to the authority of the institution that maintains it (controls its interpretation, commissions its translation) – although here the cenobitic Augustine is by far the more 'reliable' guide. Jerome, the fiery eremite, counsels piety and submission in tones that ring with barely suppressed impious revolt.<sup>122</sup>

The Anglo-Saxons inherited this shared set of core principles along with the conflicting detritus of eremitic and cenobitic habits and traditions. In one reading, Alfred is a maverick translator following the example of Jerome because despite his formal training he has confidence in his problem-solving ability and in his endeavor; another interpretation, however, states that Alfred's translations were as much the result of his ecclesiastical advisers and the king was thus translating, cenobitically, in line with the proper authorities. Similarly, Ælfric is a leader among Benedictines, a cenobitic order, and as such his choice to translate the *Rule* was a responsibility handed down to him and not something he undertook on his own. However, his choice to alter the dictates of his sacrosanct source to suit the

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<sup>122</sup> Robinson (1992), 8.

theological and political context of Anglo-Saxon England is more akin to Jerome's adaptable attitude towards his sources. Ælfric is a particularly illustrative example of some tensions between eremitic and cenobitic ideologies: much like Jerome's defense in his *Letter*, Ælfric's advocacy of a word-for-word strategy seems to be mere lip-service to orthodoxy in the face of his extensive corpus of relatively free vernacular renderings. Yet, even at the end of his life, in his *Libellus*, Ælfric manages to be humble and self-effacing while also offering his scriptural translations as the only option for Old English readers. These examples oversimplify the details but they hint at the very real churn of theories and practices that make this period particularly difficult and simultaneously rich for research into translation and hermeneutics.

Taking a wider perspective, when missionaries imported patristic ideas and ideals into the British Isles, they gave Anglo-Saxons the necessary ingredients for an intellectual renaissance, but the distinctly different cultural, religious, and linguistic settings meant that some of those ascetic, patristic principles had to be manipulated or even discarded. What was good advice for Latin translators was not similarly useful for Old English translators. The Church's centuries-long grip on translation was loosened as writers and thinkers in the English vernacular started to grapple with scripture and related writings. It is implausible that the highly dogmatized and codified translation and hermeneutic doctrines of the patristic fathers were imported unfiltered by the native foment of language and culture. The collision of patristic values with the vernacular setting created a mess

of ideas whose origins remain too twisted and mangled to be clearly discerned. At the fringes of the Church's world, early English translators were far away from the continental centers of ecclesiastical authority, and this distance allowed the development of a distinctly British brand of Christianity, accompanied by a vernacular corpus of texts. Alfred praised the monastic tradition but he translated partly because he felt there were not enough educated people left who could accomplish the same task. Unattached to the formal body of the Church, the monarch likely had even more autonomy than other vernacular translators. Venuti argues that autonomy holds a privileged position in contemporary translation discourse because "The history of translation theory can in fact be imagined as a set of changing relationships between the relative autonomy of the translated text and two other categories: equivalence and function."<sup>123</sup> This same autonomy meant that Alfred was more likely to make mistakes, for example, but, as a unique feature of translation practice in England, autonomy also freed him and others to make choices that were less restricted by orthodoxy and, consequently, less recognizable from the standpoint of translation theory in the "modern" world.

One assumption integral to my project – but the exhuming of which falls outside its parameters – is that whatever their efficacy for creating a lexicon, the models and paradigms of translation that form the foundations for its contemporary practices and theories are insufficient for explicating Anglo-Saxon methodologies. More detailed research into the reasons for this

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<sup>123</sup> *The Translation Studies Reader*, 5.



incommensurability will help reveal what differentiates the work of Old English translators from patristic figures and later medieval writers. However, I want to provide at least a few examples to further underscore some of the primary gaps as well as overlaps.

The most significant nineteenth century contributor to translation studies is undoubtedly Freidrich Schleiermacher, who is credited in particular with introducing a new binary paradigm of translation methodologies that has served in some circles as a replacement of the word-for-word and sense-for-sense structure. In his 1813 lecture to the Berlin Academy of Sciences, “On the Different Methods of Translating,” Schleiermacher made a distinction between domestication and foreignization: “Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader toward him. Or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author toward him.”<sup>124</sup> The first sentence aligns with foreignization and literalist methods, while the second supports domestication through freer strategies. Schleiermacher expressed strong support for a relative literalism that he had inherited in part from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Gottfried von Herder. A fundamental principle of this cohort and its supporters is that making the act of reading the translation difficult for the reader is preferable to sacrificing semantic accuracy. German nationalism fueled this discussion as well, for Romantics like Goethe and Herder

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<sup>124</sup> “On the Different Methods of Translation,” trans. Susan Bernofsky, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 49.

saw translation as a form of cultural evolution: translating and reading a canonical text from a foreign culture helps improve German culture and language. The translation practices of Alfred, Æpelwold, and Ælfric are largely representative of domestication, whereby potentially difficult or disruptive aspects of the source text are replaced with equivalent references relating to the target audience's culture and expectations. Didactic and cultural concerns ultimately override textual fidelity, even where scripture is concerned. *Especially* where scripture is concerned. While these three translators would have rejected Schleiermacher's particular literalism, they would have identified with his appraisal of translation as an instrument of cultural and linguistic improvement. Ironically, it is for that same reason that all three domesticate their source texts, repackaging their knowledge for easier incorporation into a relatively young target culture.

Alfred, Æpelwold, and Ælfric also saw the task of the translator quite differently from the most important twentieth century German translation scholar, Walter Benjamin. The opening sentence to "The Task of the Translator" declares "In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful,"<sup>125</sup> and later Benjamin writes "Whenever a translation undertakes to serve the reader, it demonstrates [the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content]."<sup>126</sup> Benjamin was in pursuit of an ideal language that communicates truth at a level behind and beyond that of the word, similar to the

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<sup>125</sup> Benjamin, 253.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

adamic or Antediluvian tongue spoken by a unified mankind before the events at Babel, but it is a language that no audience could comprehend. Benjamin's theoretical exploration is conspicuously lacking in any applied examples to support his arguments but they have become touchstones in for translation scholars nevertheless. Here is one of the most important statements from his essay:

Therefore, it is not the highest praise of a translation...to say that it reads as if it had originally been written in that language. Rather, the significance of fidelity as ensured by literalness is that the work reflects the great longing for the linguistic complementation of language. True translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator.<sup>127</sup>

I have found no evidence that Alfred, Æþelwold, or Ælfric were interested in flattening all the distinctive stylistic and grammatical markers of their Latin sources — on the contrary, it was common for vernacular translators to emulate linguistic patterns and borrow vocabulary from a prestige source. Latin was the standard against which other languages were measured; thus, in his *Grammar*, Ælfric even translates Old English grammar into the Latin model, resulting in “a

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 81.

grammar of English which aims to imitate the grammar of Latin, but which – with regard to grammatical categories – is several centuries in advance of the state of the language as it was spoken and written during his lifetime.”<sup>128</sup> But as I illustrated, even in his most literal translation Ælfric does not hold to a word-for-word standard that would satisfy Benjamin, or any modern literalist hard-liners. No Old English translator does because they all acknowledge, either implicitly or explicitly, through explanation or application, that the act of translation cannot be divorced from interpretation. What makes a translation true is inspiration, not transparency.

On the surface, Old English translation shares more overlap with the precepts espoused by Hans Vermeer’s *Skopos* theory, which was introduced in the 1970s and 80s as an alternative to the paradigms dominated by equivalence. *Skopos* is the Greek term for “purpose” or “aim,” and Vermeer argues that the *skopos* of the target translation should supersede the desire to maintain equivalence with the source text because a text can be translated in different ways depending on its intended function in the target culture. What makes *Skopos* theory intriguing is that it does not attempt to prescribe or elevate particular purposes. Vermeer writes, “What the *Skopos* states is that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target text. The theory does not state what the principle is: this must be determined separately in

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<sup>128</sup> *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 120.

each specific case.”<sup>129</sup> Vermeer was at the vanguard of descriptive translatology, a branch of study that had grown weary of the failures of prescriptivism, and weary of the failure of prescriptivists to admit this failure. If we consider *Skopos* theory in terms of Venuti’s tripartite structure of autonomy, equivalence, and function, it is clear that function is of primary importance. In all of the translations explored in my dissertation, function is of far more import than equivalence, despite some of Ælfric’s protestations, and the common denominator among possible purposes is education: Alfred, Æpelwold, and Ælfric undertook their translations for expressly didactic reasons that are borne out by the strategies used.

Alfred tries to remove or simplify some of the more complicated aspects of Augustine’s Neoplatonic philosophy not because he disagrees but because Anglo-Saxon readers – including himself and even his team of advisers – didn’t have enough contextual information to interpret those doctrines. Æpelwold restricts his use of the hermeneutic style in the *Rule* because he is aware that newly initiated members of monastic communities would likely lack the skill required to appreciate the combination of rhetoric and vocabulary. Ælfric claims that word-for-word translation is the only way to preserve the transcendental meaning of scripture but he proceeds to render Genesis quite liberally, including exegetical asides that help orient his readers at obscure passages. *Skopos* theory does not, however, walk lockstep with Anglo-Saxon practice and theory. Vermeer’s

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<sup>129</sup> Hans Vermeer, “Skopos and Commission in Translational Action,” trans. Andrew Chesterman, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 198.

paradigm completely devalues semantic equivalence by identifying it as a stricture necessary only for uneducated translators working with texts that have unstable meanings. Augustine would agree with the assessment that equivalence provides a needed semblance of standardization over large numbers of unevenly educated interpreters and translators. He wrote *De doctrina christiana* to communicate “certain rules for interpreting the scriptures which, ... can usefully be passed on to those with an appetite for such study to enable them to progress.”<sup>130</sup> Later in the same preface, Augustine states “the person who has assimilated the rules that I am trying to teach, when he finds a difficulty in the text, will not need another interpreter to reveal what is obscure, because he comprehends certain rules. By following up various clues he can unerringly arrive at the hidden meaning for himself or at least avoid falling into incongruous misconceptions.”<sup>131</sup> While Vermeer’s theory assumes all translators are professional scholars with access to any requisite resources as well as the knowledge to wield them, Augustine knows that this is not the case for interpreters, translators, and preachers in his own time, so *De doctrina christiana* is meant to give them a stable structure of dogma. Alfred, for example, took up the task of translating precisely because there was a dearth of professional, knowledgeable scholars in England. While *Skopos* theory presents contemporary theorists and practitioners with a useful alternative to equivalence-driven

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<sup>130</sup> Preface, Reissued Edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 1.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

paradigms, it still does not encapsulate patristic and medieval translation, although it does give specialists a useful set of tools for gaining insight into potential purposes to translation besides equivalence.

There are many other important figures in translation and hermeneutics that offer new models for analyzing translation in the far-flung past and modern day. George Steiner's fourfold model of translation, "the hermeneutic motion," has some interesting affinities with Alfred's practice and theory in particular; and Hans Georg Gadamer's theory of interpretation owes so much to Roman and patristic writers that Rita Copeland cites him in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*. Changing "translation studies" to "translatology" will not on its own effect the developments necessary for creating a future where translation specialists and Anglo-Saxon scholars work together to shore each other's gaps. However, more research into what these theories can tell scholars about translation into Old English will help both medievalists and translation scholars, because I am certain that one-sided research agendas will not lead to results that are particularly useful to a wide array of scholars in numerous fields of study.

My interest in the Anglo-Saxon period has always stemmed from the unique positions of its cultural and literary traditions, with origins rooted in the classical past but its people and leaders making advancements that turn England into one of the most important places in the medieval world. My dissertation has revealed how Alfred, Æþelwold, and Ælfric borrowed from both the foreign and domestic past to forge a new way forward for their language and culture, and I

have used comparative analysis, translation, and hermeneutic theory to indicate that the subjective judgments of contemporary scholars have debilitated essential research into Old English translation. While translation may seem to be but one tiny part of many individual projects and enterprises, fundamentally an act of translation is an attempt to reconcile different worldviews. To better understand the compromises Old English translators faced, medievalists and translators need to make reconciliations of their own.



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## Vita

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